

Weekly Parsha VAYEIRA

Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein

VAYEIRA

Wars, family dysfunction, and the danger of future extinction are the challenges that confront our father Avraham and our mother Sarah in the narrative that dominates this week's Torah reading. In this era, correcting the past and editing personal biographies to make people's lives appear perfect, serene and smooth, is especially true. This methodology attempts to make the subject character the model and prototype for others to admire and perhaps even imitate.

Who wants to have a life of troubles, frustrations, domestic strife and risk of destruction – all for the sake of a noble but very unpopular cause? So, why would the Torah not wish to at least “pretty up” the story of Avraham and his family at least by omission if not by commission? Of course the Torah is the book of absolute truth and therefore brooks none of the human weaknesses that affect all of us when dealing – even in our most objective attempt – with narratives and biographies.

The message here is that truth is the most important value and outweighs all other considerations. The Torah is determined to teach us that life, even for the greatest of people, is oftentimes difficult, disappointing, and sometimes even cruel. And, that faith and commitment, goodness and morality are the supports that justify our very existence, no matter the challenges that constantly engulf human life. We are not bidden to emulate Avraham's life experiences. Rather, we are bidden to emulate his traits of belief and resilience, commitment and unwavering goodness.

We are taught that God's seal, so to speak, is truth. Truth is the gift that we ask God to grant to Yaakov and his descendants. Maimonides explains to us that we are not to serve idols, believe in superstitions and worship the dead, because all of these are false, little more than a pack of lies. And all of that is also applicable to belief in ideologies that have long lost any sense of truth, as to their goals and certainly as to their methods and policies.

Avraham sees that Sodom is to be destroyed because of its falseness. He recognizes that Avimelech cannot be trusted because he is a hypocritically false person. And Avraham reserves the right to serve the cause of God's truth even at the cost, originally, of his own life, and later that of his own beloved son. The Talmud describes our world as being “a world of falseness.” Yet knowing that we inhabit a world of falseness is the first step towards advancing into a world of honesty and truth.

That is what is meant by the biblical admonition to attempt to go in God's ways. To be aware of the difference between falsehood and truth is the necessary ingredient for intelligent life and eternal faith. Avraham's difficulties in

life point us towards the way of realism and truth. It knows no compromises or avoidances. It is eternal.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

VAYERA :: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZT" L

To Bless the Space Between Us

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

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

Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham is about to become a great and mighty nation, and through him all the nations on earth will be blessed. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He spoke of for him.”

Gen. 18:17-9

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

No sooner do we notice this than we recall that the first person in history to be given a proper name was Chava, Eve, because, said Adam, “she is the mother of all life.” (Gen. 3:20) Note that motherhood is drawn attention to in the Torah long before fatherhood (twenty generations to be precise, ten from Adam to Noah, and ten from Noah to Abraham). The reason is that motherhood is a biological phenomenon. It is common to almost all forms of advanced life. Fatherhood is a cultural phenomenon. There is little in biology that supports pair-bonding, monogamy, and faithfulness in marriage, and less still that connects males with their offspring. That is why fatherhood always needs reinforcement from the moral code operative in a society. Absent that, and families fragment very fast indeed, with the burden being overwhelmingly borne by the abandoned mother.

This emphasis on parenthood – motherhood in the case of Eve, fatherhood in that of Abraham – is absolutely central to Jewish spirituality, because what Abrahamic monotheism brought into the world was not just a mathematical reduction of the number of gods from many to one. The God of Israel is not primarily the God of the

scientists who set the universe into motion with the Big Bang. It is not the God of the philosophers, whose necessary being undergirds our contingency. Nor is it even the God of the mystics, the Ein Sof, the Infinity that frames our finitude. The God of Israel is the God who loves us and cares for us as a parent loves for, and cares for, a child.

Sometimes God is described as our father:

“Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?”
Malachi 2:10

Sometimes, especially in the late chapters of the book of Isaiah, God is described as a mother: “Like one whom his mother comforts, so shall I comfort you.” (Is. 66:13) “Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.” (Is. 49:15) The primary attribute of God, especially whenever the four-letter name Hashem is used, is compassion, the Hebrew word for which, rachamim, comes from the word rechem, meaning “a womb”.

Thus our relationship with God is deeply connected to our relationship with our parents, and our understanding of God is deepened if we have had the blessing of children (I love the remark of a young American Jewish mother: “Now that I’ve become a parent I find that I can relate to God much better: now I know what it’s like creating something you can’t control”). All of which makes the story of Abraham very hard to understand for two reasons. The first is that Abraham was the son told by God to leave his father:

“Go – from your land, your birthplace, and your father’s house...”

Gen. 12:1

The second is that Abraham was the father told by God to sacrifice his son: Then God said: “Take your son, your only son, the one whom you love – Isaac – and go to the land of Moriah. There, offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, the one that I will show you.”

Gen. 22:2

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

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

I argued last week that Abraham was in fact continuing a journey his father Terach had already begun. However, it takes a certain maturity on our part before we realize this, since our first reading of the narrative seems to suggest that Abraham was about to set out on a journey that was completely new. Abraham, in the famous midrashic tradition, was the iconoclast who took a hammer to his father’s idols. Only later in life do we fully appreciate that,

despite our adolescent rebellions, there is more of our parents in us than we thought when we were young. But before we can appreciate this, there has to be an act of separation.

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

First separate, then join. First individuate, then relate. That is one of the fundamentals of Jewish spirituality. We are not God. God is not us. It is the clarity of the boundaries between heaven and earth that allows us to have a healthy relationship with God. It is true that Jewish mysticism speaks about bittul ha-yesh, the complete nullification of the self in the all-embracing infinite light of God, but that is not the normative mainstream of Jewish spirituality. What is so striking about the heroes and heroines of the Hebrew Bible is that when they speak to God, they remain themselves. God does not overwhelm us. That is the principle the Kabbalists called tzimtzum, God’s self-limitation. God makes space for us to be ourselves.

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

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

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

[Rav Frand - Kofin Al Midas Sodom - Forcing Kindness

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1136 – I have a Toothache / Headache / Cold – Do I Still Have To Daven? Good Shabbos!

In Parsha Vayera, Avraham Avinu prayed for the people of Sodom, despite the fact that the Sodomites were polar opposites of him. Avraham Avinu was the Man of Chesed. The people of Sodom institutionalized “anti-chessed behavior.” Avraham Avinu was renowned for his

hospitality and practice of welcoming guests. Many Medrashim describe how they abused guests in Sodom. We know the fate of Sodom.

But we learn out a practical halacha from the Torah's narrative about Sodom. There is a principle called "Kofin al midas Sodom" – there are certain situations where Beis Din has the ability to force a person to do a chessed if non-performance of such a kindness would fall into the category of "Sodomite attributes." What is a classic example? "Zeh ne'heneh v'zeh lo chossar." (This person benefits and the other person suffers no loss.) Someone who refuses to let another person use his item, even though it will not cost him anything, is practicing Sodomite behavior. Beis Din is allowed to step in and force the owner of the item to bestow the favor to his neighbor.

For example, if Reuven is driving up Park Heights Ave and Shimon wants a ride in the same direction that Reuven is travelling, and it will cause no extra wear and tear or extra time or gas consumption on Reuven's part, refusing to take Shimon would be midas Sodom.

The Rambam wrote an interesting letter to one of his disciples on this subject. The Rambam wrote a sefer called Moreh Nevuchim (Guide to the Perplexed). It was a controversial sefer, and certain people viewed some of its ideas as heretical and condemned its author. Incredibly, they called the Rambam an Apikorus for what he wrote in the Moreh Nevuchim (and for some of what he wrote in other places as well).

A student of the Rambam took up his Rebbe's honor and fought against these people. The Rambam wrote a letter to him and told him to leave these critics alone. He argued, "This is an example of Kofin al midas Sodom." He said "What they say does not hurt me. It does not cost me anything. They want to do it, and they get pleasure from doing it." He said, "Let them go ahead, let them abuse me, let them call me a heretic. It makes no difference to me."

This is an incredible application of Kofin Al Midas Sodom.
----- Prayer Has the Power to Nullify Heavenly Decrees

"Hashem appeared to Avimelech in a dream at night and told him, 'Behold you are going to die for having taken the woman you took, for she is a married woman.'" (Bereshis 20:3)

Thinking that Sora was the sister rather than the wife of Avraham, Avimelech took Sora into his house. Hashem came to Avimelech in a dream and told him that he was deserving of death for this matter. The Almighty then added, "And now return this woman to her husband for he is a prophet and he will pray for you that you might live. And if you do not return (her) know that you will die..." (Bereshis 20:7)

The words "Behold you will die" spoken by the Ribono shel Olam in pasuk 3 are the equivalent of "YOU ARE A DEAD MAN!" If the Ribono shel Olam pronounces someone a dead man, is that not a Divine Decree? After a

Divine Decree, should it not be a done deal? And yet, Hashem then instructs in pasuk 7, "Return this woman to her husband and he will pray for you so that you may live." We see from this latter pasuk, that even if a person has a death sentence upon himself, prayer can nullify the death sentence. It does not always work. It does not always happen. But that is what this pasuk is saying: Behold you will die. You are a dead man. Nevertheless, he will pray for you. Prayer helps.

The same thing occurs in two other places in Tanach.

Yeshaya the prophet comes to Chezkiyahu, King of Yehuda, and tells him prophetically "You will die. You will not live." (Yeshaya 38:1) The very next pasuk says, "And Chezkiyahu turned his face to the wall and he prayed to Hashem." (ibid. 38:2) Guess what? Chezkiyahu lived for fifteen more years. What happened to the prophetic decree? The decree was prior to his prayer.

The primary example of this is Hashem's decree to Moshe: "You shall not cross this Jordan (River)" (Devorim 3:27). The Almighty decreed that Moshe Rabbeinu would not enter Eretz Yisrael. And yet the pasuk says, "And I prayed (Vo'Eschanan) to Hashem at that time saying..." (Devorim 3:24). Chazal say that Moshe davened the gematria (numeric value) of the word Vo'Eschanan, in other words, 515 times, after which Hashem told him, "Do not speak to me any more about this matter" (Devorim 3:26) because if you pray even one more time, I will need to let you enter the Land of Israel. What does that mean? He is the Ribono shel Olam! How can Moshe force His Hand? We see here again, that the Ribono shel Olam created an institution in this world called prayer. Prayer has a power—even to nullify a decree from Heaven.

Splitting of Wood Foreshadows Splitting of Reed Sea – Measure for Measure

The pasuk says "And Avraham got up early in the morning, he saddled his donkey, he took his two lads with him, and his son Yitzchak, AND HE SPLIT WOOD FOR THE OLAH OFFERING..." (Bereshis 22:3). He is on the way to the Akeida, during which he expects to offer Yitzchak as a korban. Offerings are burnt on a mizbayach. Wood is needed for the fire. In order to prepare the wood, he split the wood before beginning his journey (Va'Yevaka atzei Olah).

The Medrash says that Hashem proclaimed, "I will split for his descendants the Reed Sea in the merit of his having split the wood, as it is written "Va'Yevaka atzei Olah" (Bereshis 22:3) and it is written "Va'Yebaku haMayim" (Shemos 14:21). The Torah uses the same root word by Krias Yam Suf to indicate splitting that it uses by Avraham's splitting wood for the Akeida. In the merit of Avraham's chopping the wood, the waters at Yaf Suf split! If the Medrash would say that in the merit of the Akeidas Yitzchak the Yam split, I could understand that. The Akeida involved superhuman mesiras nefesh for Avraham to sacrifice his own son. But how does splitting the wood

merit such a miracle? Avraham needed to cut the wood because he needed fire wood! What was so special about that action that merited the great miracle of Krias Yam Suf?

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (1873-1960; Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim) interpreted the Medrash as follows: The Gemara says that it is easier to carry fifty pounds of gold than fifty pounds of feathers. Why is that? Is it not the same fifty pounds whether it is feathers or gold? The answer is that an ingot of gold is dense and compact and easy to carry. However, fifty pounds of feathers is very bulky, and is far clumsier to transport.

Now if you were Avraham Avinu and you needed to sacrifice your son, and you knew that you needed firewood, so you needed to take some with you in case you would not find firewood on site, what should you do? Does it make sense to take one compact log, or to cut up the log before leaving home and shlep all the fragments of twigs and wood that came out of the chopping activity? Obviously, it is much easier to take the hunk of wood and chop it when you get to your destination! Avraham travelled for three days carrying this clumsy sack of wood! Very inefficient!

Why did he do it that way? The answer is that when he arrived at the site of the Akeida and he put Yitzchak on the Mizbayach, he wanted to complete the job ASAP. He did not want to torment Yitzchak any more than necessary. If Yitzchak is lying there on the Mizbayach and then his father needs to begin chopping wood, Yitzchak may panic, or at the very least there will be inui ha'din (psychological trauma as a result of delayed implementation of judgement). Avraham Avinu did not want to prolong the agony of his son. He had the sensitivity and foresight to chop the wood before he left home so that when he arrived, everything would be ready.

Rav Tzvi Pesach cites a Medrash that when the Sea was split, they were supposed to step into the sea and then a little water would part. Then they would go further and more would part. With each step forward, more water would part. However, in the meantime, they would be surrounded by intimidating walls of water. The Ribono shel Olam said, "Avraham Avinu had the sensitivity to do the Akeida in a fashion that his act of chopping would not cause undue stress. So too, Va'Yibaku HaMayim, as soon as they entered the water, the entire sea split open, and they could immediately see the light at the end of the tunnel. This was the midah k'neged midah. The sensitivity of Avraham by the Akeida to not inflict any more anguish than necessary was replicated by the Almighty when He split the sea in a way which diminished the anguish of Bnei Yisrael.

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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayera (Genesis 18:1 – 22:24)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "Take your son, your only son, the one whom you love, Isaac, and dedicate him there for a burnt offering [or a dedication; literally, a lifting up] on one of the mountains which I will tell you of." (Genesis 22:2)

As we have seen, there are manifold possibilities of interpreting God's most difficult directive to Abraham. But in order for us to truly appreciate the eternal quality of Torah, let us examine how the martyrs of Jewish history have taken – and drawn inspiration from – this drama of the Akeida (binding).

In the city of Worms, in 1096, some 800 people were killed in the course of two days at the end of the month of Iyar. In The Last Trial, Professor Shalom Spiegel's study of the Akeida, he records a chronicle of that period that cites a declaration by one of the community's leaders, Rabbi Meshulam bar Isaac:

"All you great and small, hearken unto me. Here is my son that God gave me and to whom my wife Tziporah gave birth in her old age. Isaac is this child's name. And now I shall offer him up as father Abraham offered up his son Isaac."

Sadly, the chronicle concludes with the father slaying the boy himself, in the presence of his wife. When the distraught parents leave the room of their sacrifice, they are both cruelly slaughtered by the murdering Christians.

Spiegel quotes from a dirge of the time:

"Compassionate women in tears, with their own hands slaughtered, as at the Akeida of Moriah. Innocent souls withdrew to eternal life, to their station on high..."

The biblical story of the binding of Isaac is replayed via the Talmudic invocation of the ram's horn (shofar) each year on Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment and Renewal. The shofar symbolizes the ram substitute for Isaac on Mount Moriah; God commands that we hearken to the cries of this shofar 'in order that I may remember for your benefit the binding of Isaac the son of Abraham, and I shall account it for you as if you yourselves bound yourselves up before Me' (Rosh Hashanah 16a).

This message of the shofar has inspired Jews of all generations to rise to the challenge of martyrdom whenever necessary, transforming themselves into Abrahams and

Saraha, placing their precious children on the altar of Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of the divine name.

Indeed, there was apparently a stubborn tradition which insisted that Abraham actually went through with the act of sacrifice. After all, following the biblical command of the angel to Abraham (the *deus ex machina* as it were) – ‘Do not cast your hand against the lad’ (Genesis 22:19), where is Isaac? If, indeed, his life has just been saved, why doesn’t he accompany his father, why don’t they go together to the lads, why don’t they – father and son – return home together to Beer Sheva and Sarah (as they have been described twice as doing – father and son walking together – in the context of the Akeda story)?!

Moreover, when they first approached the mountain of sacrifice, Abraham tells the young men to wait down below:

‘I and the boy will go yonder; we will worship and we will come back to you’ (Genesis 22:5).

So why does the text have Abraham return alone?

On the basis of this textual problem, Ibn Ezra (1089–1164) makes mention of an interpretation that suggests that Abraham literally followed God’s command, slaying his son, and that God later on miraculously brought Isaac back to life. It is precisely that stark and startling deletion of Isaac’s name from the conclusion of the biblical account of the Akeda itself which gave countless generations of Jewish martyrs the inspiration for their sacrifice; and this is the case, even though Ibn Ezra felt compelled to deny the tradition as inaccurate:

“Isaac is not mentioned. But he who asserts that Abraham slew Isaac and abandoned him, and that afterwards Isaac came to life again, is speaking contrary to the biblical text” (Ibn Ezra, Genesis 22:1).

Ibn Ezra is obviously making reference to a commentary which Jewish martyrdom would not allow to fall into oblivion.

The earliest reference to this notion of Isaac’s actual sacrifice is probably the Midrash Hagadol which cites R. Eleazer ben Pedat, a first generation Amora of the Talmud:

“Although Isaac did not die, Scripture regards him as though he had died. And his ashes lay piled on the altar. That’s why the text mentions Abraham and not Isaac.”

And perhaps one might argue that Isaac was so traumatized by the Akeda that a specific aspect of him did die, part of his personality which would always remain on the altar. After all, Isaac is the most ethereal and passive of the patriarchs, called by the Midrash – even after the binding – the *olah temimah*, the whole burnt offering.

But this psychological interpretation and Ibn Ezra’s rejection notwithstanding, the penitential Slichot prayers still speak of the ‘ashes of Isaac’ on the altar, continuing to give credence to the version which suggests that Isaac did suffer martyrdom. And we have already cited recorded incidents of children who suffered martyrdom at the hands

of their parents, who did not wish them to be violated by the pagan tyrants.

God’s command to sacrifice Isaac, and Abraham’s submissive silence, may actually help us understand how a people promised greatness, wealth and innumerable progeny comparable to the stars, find the courage and the faith to endure the suffering and martyrdom mercilessly inflicted upon them by virtually every Christian or Islamic society with which they come into contact.

The paradox in Jewish history is that unless we were willing to sacrifice our children for God, we would never have survived as a God-inspired and God-committed nation with a unique message for ourselves and the world. Perhaps that is why Mount Moriah, the place of the willingness to sacrifice, is the Temple Mount of the Holy City of Jerusalem: the place from which God will ultimately be revealed to all of humanity; the place of Jewish eternity.

Shabbat Shalom!

[Essay Vayeira Angels & Mustard What Angels Don't Understand About Holiness Rabbi YY Jacobson

November 2, 2012 | 17 Cheshvan 5773

Class Summary:

Angels and Mustard - What Angels Don't Understand About Humans

Out Of This World?

A man returning from the world's first wedding on Pluto seemed disappointed.

"What's wrong?" asked his friend. "The band was no good?"

"The band was great," he answered.

"The food was lousy?" asked his friend.

"Out of this world!"

"Nu! So, what was the problem?" asked his friend.

"There was no atmosphere."

Hospitality

The opening of this week's Torah portion[1], Vayeira, relates the tale of Abraham sitting during a hot day at the entrance of his tent and observing three men standing nearby. He ran toward them and insisted they come to relax in his tent.

Abraham was very specific[2]: "Let some water be brought and wash your feet, and recline beneath the tree. I will fetch a morsel of bread so that you may sustain yourself."

The three men consent and accept Abraham's invitation.

At this point, the Torah gives us a detailed account of what transpired during the following moments[3]:

"Abraham rushed to the tent to Sarah [his wife] and said, 'Hurry! Three measures[4] of the finest flour! Knead it and make rolls! Then Abraham ran to the cattle, took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the young man who rushed to prepare it.

"He took cottage cheese[5] and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed these before them; he stood over them as they ate under the tree."

"They asked him, 'Where is Sarah your wife? And he said, 'Behold — in the tent!'"

"I will return to you this time next year,' said [one of the men], 'and your wife Sarah will have a son.'"

The continuation of the narrative makes it clear[6] that these three visitors were no simple men, but rather spiritual energies, or angels, manifested in the bodies and the guise of men. These angels were sent to carry out three monumental tasks described in the continuation of the story: A) to inform Abraham that Sarah would give birth to a child; B) to overturn the evil city of Sodom and, finally, C) to rescue Abraham's nephew Lot and his family who lived in Sodom[7].

Three Questions

The commentators raise a few questions.

1) Since two of the three angels came to carry out tasks unrelated to Abraham, why did these two angels come to Abraham's home first[8]?

2) Why does the Torah find it necessary to inform us of the exact words and tasks of Abraham upon greeting the guests, including the exact menu of what he served them? If the Torah wished to teach us about his extraordinary hospitality, couldn't it have simply stated that Abraham took care of all their needs?

3) The question the men asked Abraham — "Where is Sarah your wife?" — seems amiss, since after Abraham told them where she was, they did not proceed to address her, and continued speaking to Abraham. Why did they ask this question[9]?

Visiting A Rebbe

The Chassidic masters offer a moving homiletical interpretation of this biblical episode[10].

According to Jewish tradition[11], there exists in each generation a tzaddik, a great moral giant, who serves as the spiritual foundation of the world, as a bridge between heaven and earth. This is a human being who carries the burden of history on his shoulders and always has his finger on the pulse of the generation. While others plan their vacations and retirements, this person cannot sleep at night as long as there is one soul in G-d's universe hurting. In his times, Abraham served as this tzaddik, the Rebbe (spiritual master) of the world. When three angels were dispatched to pay a visit to planet Earth, they were determined to visit this extraordinary human being. They longed to be touched by his soul, inspired by his spirituality, and ignited by his passion. The angels craved to encounter the majesty of holiness at its peak.

When the three angels approached Abraham's tent, they expected to discover a soul burning with a sacred flame, steeped in heavenly meditation, melting away in infinite ecstasy. They expected to find a spirit dancing with the Divine, free of any trace of the mundane, suspended above

the crassness of the physical universe and its materialistic trappings.

The Shocking Moment

What was the reality the angels actually encountered?

"Let some water be brought and wash your feet, and recline beneath the tree," the great Rebbe, Abraham, declared. "I will fetch a morsel of bread so that you may sustain yourself," were the words that came out of G-d's ambassador to planet earth.

"Abraham rushed to the tent to Sarah [his wife] and said, 'Hurry! Three measures of the finest flour! Knead it and make rolls! Then Abraham ran to the cattle, took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the young man who rushed to prepare it. He took cottage cheese and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed these before them; he stood over them as they ate under the tree.'"

A man of infinite ecstasy? No. A good chef who knows how to run a smooth kitchen — that is what they saw in Abraham.

"We thought we were coming to a Rebbe," they must have thought to themselves. "Instead, we ended up at a butcher." In lieu of finding the light of the divine radiating from Abraham's tent, they discovered an old man running around, tongue and mustard in his hands[12]! "We must have come to the wrong location," the angels mused.

What About The Wife?

Then a thought came to their mind that perhaps when they heard in heaven that Abraham was the tzaddik of the generation, it was actually referring not to him but to his counterpart, Sarah. She might be the real master of the generation and Abraham merely her attendant.

So the narrative continues: "They asked him, 'Where is Sarah your wife[13]?' Perhaps we can get a glimpse of your wife and we will finally encounter the presence of authentic holiness.

"And he said, 'Behold — in the tent!'" What Abraham was telling the angels is that if they did not 'get it' henceforth, seeing Sarah wouldn't do the job either, for she is even more concealed than Abraham. She is concealed in the tent. Her true identity is not easily appreciated.

Angels Enlightened

At that moment, for the first time, the angels realized how deeply they had erred. In their longing to encounter holiness, they missed the ultimate point: that the authentic majesty of human holiness consists of a person's daily acts of love, selflessness, and graciousness performed amid the stress and lowliness of physical existence. The angels failed to recognize that the genuine experience of serving G-d means not to soar to the heavens searching for angels, but to be there for another human being in a very real and pragmatic way.

"Hurry! Three measures of the finest flour! Knead it and make rolls!" In this simple, mundane behavior, Abraham constructed a fragment of heaven on earth.

What Life Is Really Like

"I will return to you this time next year, and your wife Sarah will have a son," came the response of the angel. This was not merely a communication of G-d's earlier promise to Abraham; it was also a response of an angel in awe of the revolution that Abraham introduced to the world, in which a human being in his ordinary daily behavior can build a home for G-d. Abraham's revolution, the angel insisted, must have a future in the form of a family, and, ultimately, a people, charged with the mission to teach the world how to fuse heaven and earth.

The angels never forgot that visit. Abraham gave them not only a sobering lesson in what real life is like but also a lesson of what it meant to be authentically spiritual.

True spirituality, Abraham was communicating to the angels, lies not in man's attempt to escape the trappings of the world, but rather in his commitment to drawing down light and beauty into the darkness of life. It is only here -- not in Pluto -- that you can create the real atmosphere.

Above the Angels

This explains an enigmatic change in the language of the text. In the beginning of the narrative detailing the visit of the angels, we read: "vehinei shlosa anoshim nitzavim aluv," meaning that the angels were standing over him. Later, when the guests are being served by Abraham, we read: "vehu omed aleihem," meaning that Abraham stood over them[14].

It was through this act of hospitality that Abraham rose far and beyond the angels; he was now standing over and above them. Through simple human kindness practiced on earth that the human being reaches far beyond the most spiritual angels.

[1] Genesis chapter 18.

[2] Ibid. 18:4.

[3] Ibid. 18:6.

[4] Se'ahs in Hebrew. This is equivalent to around 30 cups or 9 pounds of flour!

[5] Chemah in Hebrew. See The Living Torah (by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan) for the various translations of the word.

[6] Genesis 19:1. Cf. referenced noted in the following footnote.

[7] These three tasks are explicitly stated in the biblical narrative. Our sages point out that the third angel who rescued Lot also healed Abraham after his circumcision at the age of 99 (Bava Metziah 86b; Bereshis Rabah 50:2; Rashi Genesis 18:2).

[8] According to the sources in the previous footnote, two of the angels were given tasks related to Abraham. Still the question remains, why did the third angel go to Abraham's home?

[9] See Rashi Genesis 18:9 (from the Midrash and the Talmud) for three possible answers to this question.

[10] The germ of the idea I heard from Rabbi Yisroel Twersky (Lakewood, NJ), who heard it from his relative, the distinguished Jerusalem Rabbi Baruch Shimon Schneerson (1912-2001), Rosh Yeshiva of Tshebin, and

son-in-law of the famed Tshebener Rav, Rabbi Dov Berish Weinfeld (1881-1966). Later I found it in Chidushei Harim to Vayeira, in the name of Rabbi Yechiel Michel of Zhlotshov.

[11] See Talmud Yuma 38b (based on Proverbs 10:25); Bereishis Rabah 56:7; Tikkunei Zohar Tikkun 69 (p. 114a); Kesser Shem Tov, and many Chassidic sources.

[12] See Talmud Bava Metziah 86b; Rashi to Genesis 18:7: Abraham prepared three bulls in order to feed them three tongues with mustard.

[13] This also explains why the angels felt the need to specify to Abraham in their question that Sarah was his wife ("Where is Sarah your wife"?). Surely, Abraham, knew who Sarah was! Yet the angels were explaining why they could have erred in thinking that Abraham was the tzaddik, though it was really Sarah, since they were connected as one, as a husband and wife.

[14] See Degel Machane Ephraim on the verse.

My thanks to Shmuel Levin for his editorial assistance.

Insights Parshas Vayeira Cheshvan 5783

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Mina Bas Yitzchak Isaac. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

That Healing Feeling

To him Hashem appeared, in the plains of Mamre, while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and saw three men standing before him [...] (18:1-2).

This week's parsha begins with Hashem coming to visit Avraham. Rashi (ad loc) explains the reason for the visit: "It was the third day since the circumcision, and Hakodosh Baruch Hu inquired as to his welfare." Chazal (see Sotah 14a) clearly state that Hashem came to visit Avraham for the mitzvah of bikur cholim, and we are thus instructed to visit the sick just as Hashem visited Avraham.

Hashem noticed that Avraham was pained by the fact that he couldn't fulfill the mitzvah of hachnasass orchim (inviting guests into one's home), so He summoned three "men" to come and visit with Avraham. Rashi (18:2) informs us that these "men" were actually angels sent to Avraham, each with a specific task to accomplish. According to the Talmud (Bava Metziah 86b), the angel Michael came to inform Sarah that she would give birth; Gavriel came to overturn Sdom; Rephael came to heal Avraham from his circumcision.

This seems a little odd. After all, Hashem Himself came to visit Avraham to do bikur cholim. Ostensibly, this would seem to be the highest level of "medical care" that one could hope to achieve. What possible reason would there have been to also send the angel Rephael to heal him?

One of the most under appreciated aspects of recovering from a trauma is considering the emotional state of the

patient. There have been countless studies that show that recovery is aided greatly by a person's attitude. Science has tried to explain how the emotional state directly effects the healing process (perhaps the brain releases healing endorphins, etc.) but the link is undeniable.

In other words, there are two aspects to healing: 1) recovering from the actual physical trauma to the body and managing the pain and 2) restoring the patient's proper emotional state, which has been negatively affected by a diminished sense of self. The latter is obviously very much exacerbated by the medical environment where most patients are treated like an object, or worse, a science project. The significant indignities (hospital gowns – need we say more?) suffered in that environment have a strong and deleterious effect on a patient's emotional state as it has a terribly negative impact to one's sense of self.

Hashem visited Avraham not to heal his physical body or to help manage his pain. This is, after all, the domain in which Hashem placed Rephael to administer. Rather, Hashem come to visit Avraham in order to restore Avraham's sense of self. After all, if the Almighty comes to visit you, you're a pretty "big deal," and an important part of His plan. This too is a form of medical treatment as understanding that you matter is the basis for wanting to recover, which therefore speeds up the healing process.

This is the point of bikur cholim (unfortunately, often overlooked). All too frequently, bikur cholim is performed perfunctorily; that is, the person visiting makes some "small talk" for a few moments and promptly begins to ignore the patient; either watching television, talking to other visitors, or answering phone calls and emails.

We are instructed to follow Hashem's lead in bikur cholim by making sure the person understands that our visit is all about them, conveying that we care about them, and ensuring that they know that they are important. In other words, your job in bikur cholim is to restore the patients sense of self. In this way, you are following Hashem's example and actually participating in the healing process.

People in Glass Houses...

Let a little water be fetched, please, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. I will fetch a morsel of bread, that you may nourish your hearts. After that you shall pass on; seeing that you have already come to your servant. And they said, So do, as you have said (18:3-5).

Rashi (ad loc) quoting the Gemara (Bava Metzia 86b) explains that Avraham was under the impression that these "visitors" were Arabs, whom were known to worship the dust that was on their feet. This was a type of idol worship; as they were a nomadic people who traveled frequently – thus they worshipped the "god" of the roads. They viewed the dust of the road as something sacred; something that should be bowed down to (Maharal).

The Gemara goes on to say that the angels didn't appreciate Avraham suspecting them of such a thing and actually criticized Avraham in their response: "Did you

actually suspect us to be Arabs that bow to the dust of their feet? First look at your very own son Yishmael (who regularly does that)?"

In other words, the angels are telling Avraham – before accusing others of misdeeds get your own house in order. How does the Talmud know that this is what the angels replied to Avraham? Our sages don't invent conversations out of thin air. Where in the verses can our sages deduce that this is what actually took place?

If one examines the verses carefully, it can readily be seen what caused the sages to come to this conclusion. Consider, for a moment, three people who are traveling in the blistering heat on a parched and dusty road, desperate for some sort of shelter. They come across a welcoming tent with a benevolent host offering them not only respite from the sun, but plenty of water and food as well. The host only has one stipulation; "please wash your feet, I will then fetch you water and food while you're comfortably resting in the shade of my tree."

What should be the appropriate response to this kind and generous offer? One would imagine that you don't have to have the manners and etiquette of Emily Post to respond, "Thank you kind sir! Of course we will do as you wish!" Yet the angels respond in a very odd manner; they basically command him, "So shall you do, just as you have said." Clearly Chazal are bothered that this is an inappropriate response to a kindness that is offered with a generous heart.

Chazal therefore conclude that the angels aren't responding to his generous offer, they are responding to his accusation or assumption that they are idol worshippers. Now their comments begins to resonate – before trying to fix other people's shortcomings, first take care of the very same issues that you have in your own home.

Perhaps most remarkable is how Avraham responds to their chastising of the manner in which he runs his household. After all, it's never easy to open oneself to honest criticism. One would imagine that accepting severe criticism from someone you are going out of your way to be kind and generous toward would give one serious pause. Yet Avraham takes their criticism in stride and literally "runs" to make preparations for them and otherwise oversees that all their needs aren't just minimally met; they are offered expensive delicacies and attentive service.

Undoubtedly, this is why Avraham is the paragon of the attribute of chessed. True kindness shouldn't be delivered based on your feelings toward the recipient; true kindness is based on the needs of the recipient and doing whatever you can to show them how much you appreciate the opportunity to be of service.

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Parshat Vayeira

The Centrifuge Of Prayer

“Would You destroy the entire city because of the five?”
(18:28)

I always approach the prayers of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur with some trepidation. Why are they so long and repetitive? How many times do we have to say we’re sorry to Hashem? On Yom Kippur we confess 10 times. We say the Yud Gimmel Middot, the ‘thirteen traits of mercy’ over and over again. Towards the end of Yom Kippur it seems like a race to squeeze in one more Yud Gimmel Middot before sunset brings the curtain down on the day. Why this seemingly endless repetition?

Building a nuclear weapon is a extremely difficult thing to do. Weapons-grade uranium is a highly unstable form of Uranium that makes up just 0.7 percent of the of uranium ore that is dug up. The United States nuclear weapons project – the Manhattan Project - employed more than 130,000 people and cost the equivalent of about \$23 billion today to build three atom bombs. Some 240 square miles of land were requisitioned by the US government. The Hanford atomic complex ran a fleet of 900 hundred buses for its 51,000 employees – more than the city of Chicago.

To extract the radioactive isotope U235 with the centrifuge method, it was estimated that producing a mere to 2.2 lbs of uranium-235 per day would require up to 50,000 centrifuges.

Rav Moshe Shapiro, zt”l, one of the great Rabbis of our generation, would start saying selichot, the penitential prayers leading up to Rosh Hashana, at the beginning of Elul with a Sefardi minyan, even though his native Ashekanzi tradition was to start a few days before Rosh Hashana. And when the time came for the Ashkenazi selichot to begin, he would continue to say selichot with the Sefardim as well. When asked why he did this, he replied, “Yud Gimmel Middot.”

The refining of the soul is like extracting Uranium 235 from Uranium ore. Like a centrifuge of the soul spinning and spinning, every repetition of the Yud Gimmel Middot, every vidui, every confession refines us and brings us closer to the critical mass of teshuva.

In this week’s Torah portion, Avraham prays again and again to Hashem to spare the cities of Sodom and Gemorra and the other cities of the plain. First, he beseeches Hashem to save the cities if there are a total forty-five righteous people in all five cities, and Hashem would, so to speak, complete the required quorum of ten in each place. Rashi explains that Avraham then pleaded that even if there were not forty five as a total of all the cities, each city should be looked at separately and a group of ten even in

one city would suffice even if that would not save the other cities. He then pleaded that even if forty righteous people were to be found, and then again if thirty are to be found, and then twenty, and then ten. The Ramban learns this to mean that even ten spread out across all the cities would save them all.

Avraham kept praying and praying and praying. His every prayer was a hope to refine the middah of forgiveness in this world to its maximum.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Vayeira: What will we become the parent of?
10 November 2022

It is possible for your parent not to be related to you.

And this applies to everyone. In Parshat Vayeira (Bereishit 18:19), Hashem pays the ultimate compliment to Avraham Avinu, Abraham our Patriarch.

“Lema’an asher yetzaveh et banav v’et beito acharav” –
“He shall command his children and his household following him,”

“leshamru derech Hashem laasot tzedaka umishpat,” –
“so that they will follow the way of Hashem: to practise righteousness and justice.”

There is one word which seems to be redundant. It is the word ‘acharav’ – ‘following him.’ Isn’t that obvious? I believe that this is actually the key word in this entire statement. Fascinatingly, in Bereishit 4:21, we are introduced to a man by the name of Yuval, and Yuval is described as being

“Avi kol tofes kinor veugav.” – “The father of everyone who holds a harp and a pipe.”

Yuval was the father of music! He introduced music into the world and we see he is described as ‘avi’ – ‘father.’ He’s the parent of all people who engage in musical activity, indicating that indeed somebody can be your parent, although you’re not related to them: what they have introduced influences your way of life.

Truly, that is what we mean when we refer to Avraham as being Avraham Avinu, Abraham our father. Of course we are privileged to be physically descended from him but that’s not the whole story. In addition, he introduced belief in Hashem into the world, and he went one step further. The text in Parshat Vayeira (Bereishit 18:19) tells us

“Veshamru derech Hashem laasot tzedaka umishpat.” –
“So that they should keep the way of Hashem: to practice righteousness and justice.”

Avraham didn’t only ‘parent’ the concept of belief in Hashem. He ‘parented’ a concept of derech Hashem, a true religious way of life for all those who believe in Hashem, and that way of life must include tzedaka and mishpat. The legacy of Avraham therefore empowers us in our ways to always be mindful of our responsibility for tzedaka –

righteousness, uprightness – to be considerate and to be compassionate at all times; and in addition, to guarantee that justice would always prevail.

And now there is a question we have to ask ourselves: What will we become the parents of?

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Rav Kook Torah

VaYeira: The Salt of Sodom

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

The Torah vividly contrasts the kindness and hospitality of Abraham's household with the cruelty and greed of the citizens of Sodom. When visitors arrived at Lot's home, the entire city, young and old, surrounded the house with the intention of molesting his guests. Lot's attempts to appease the rioters only aggravated their anger.

Washing after Meals

The Talmud makes an interesting connection between the evil city of Sodom and the ritual of washing hands at meals. The Sages decreed that one should wash hands before and after eating bread, as a form of ritual purification, similar to partial immersion in a mikveh (ritual bath). The rabbinical decree to wash hands before meals is based on the purification the Kohanim underwent before eating their terumah offerings.

The Talmud in Chulin 105b, however, gives a rather odd rationale for mayim acharonim, washing hands after the meal. The Sages explained that this washing removes the salt of Sodom, a dangerous salt that can blind the eyes. What is this Sodomite salt? What does it have to do with purification? How can it blind one's eyes?

The Selfishness of the People of Sodom

In order to answer to these questions, we must first understand the root source of Sodom's immorality. The people of Sodom were obsessed with fulfilling their physical desires. They concentrated on self-gratification to such a degree that no time remained for kindness towards others. They expended all of their efforts chasing after material pleasures, and no energy was left for helping the stranger.

Purifying the Soul While Feeding the Body

A certain spiritual peril lurks in any meal that we eat. Our involvement in gastronomic pleasures inevitably increases the value we assign to such activities, and decreases the importance of spiritual activities, efforts that truly perfect us. As a preventative measure, the Sages decreed that we should wash our hands before eating. Performing his ritual impresses upon us the imagery that we are like the priests, eating holy bread baked from terumah offerings. The physical meal we are about to partake suddenly takes on a spiritual dimension.

Despite this preparation, our involvement in the physical act of eating will reduce our sense of holiness to some degree. To counteract this negative influence, we wash our hands after the meal. With this ritual cleansing, we wash away the salt of Sodom, the residue of selfish preoccupation in sensual pleasures. This dangerous salt, which can blind our eyes to the needs of others, is rendered harmless through the purifying ritual of mayim acharonim.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. pp. 44-45. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 21)

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayeira

פרשת וירא תשפ"ג

אל תביט אחרריך

Do not look behind you. (19:17)

Neither Lot nor anyone in his group of survivors was permitted to look back at the carnage that was taking place. Their merit in being spared was on condition that they not be in the midst of Sodom during its destruction. Thus, they could be saved before the upheaval began. Furthermore, they were not entitled to witness the destruction of Sodom while they remained unscathed. Lot's wife did not listen. When she turned around to see what was happening to her fellows, Hashem punished her.

A deeper meaning can be attributed to the words, "Do not look behind you," one from which we can all benefit. We all have questions after the fact. Could I have acted differently? Would the end result have been different? *Rav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, quotes the *Lomza Mashgiach, Horav Moshe Rozenstein, zl*, who asks a meaningful question. One the one hand, we say and believe with complete faith that Hashem, *Asah, Oseh, v'Yaaseh es kol ha'maasim*, "He alone made, makes and will make everything." Only to Him may we ascribe events and how they will conclude. Nonetheless, it is up to us to endeavor and do whatever we can. If our *hishtadlus*, endeavoring, will not alter the course of the end result – why bother? Our actions are an exercise in futility. The *Mashgiach* explains that, indeed, we are charged with doing all that we can do. Nothing we do will affect whatever our fellow is destined to have. The businesses who compete with one another may throw all their efforts into achieving success. They should know, however, that no one else will lose due to his competitor's endeavor. He will have what is destined for him to have, and likewise, his competitor will not reap greater benefit than that what is Heavenly-designated for him. He must act. Hashem will do the rest.

This is only, explains the *Mashgiach*, with regard to the future: We must do/act/perform. With regard to the past, however, what was already done/achieved, this we must know was already determined by Hashem. One should not ruminate over what was: "I could have done this

or that differently. Had I worked harder, advertised better, used a different sales person, etc.” This is where our belief in Hashem as the One Who decides what will be the outcome of every situation comes into play. We can and should do all that we can. What ultimately happens is from Hashem.

Survivor’s guilt, which plays itself out in a scenario where one blames himself for not trying hard enough to save his fellow, is a classic case. Adult children quarreling over what is the best doctor/nursing home/health care to provide for an elderly parent is another. We must endeavor to provide the best care, do everything to help our fellow. After the fact, however, we should not point fingers. What has occurred was Hashem’s will from the very beginning.

Rav Galinsky explains that this idea is intimated by Shlomo Hamelech (*Mishlei* 16:1), *L’adam maarchei lev, u’mei Hashem maaneh lashon*, “It is for man to arrange his thoughts/feelings, but eloquent speech is a G-dly-gift” (what he says depends on Hashem). In his commentary, *Rashi* explains, “Man prepares his words that he will articulate. (All of his thoughts and feelings are applied in preparing his message/response.) The actual words that he says, however, come from Hashem. At times, Hashem causes him to stumble with his words (say the wrong thing, which undermines his purpose), or, if he merits, Hashem prepares a good reply for him.” In other words, Hashem is the final Arbiter of what we say.

Lot was instructed not to look back. This means that one should realize, acknowledge, appreciate and respect that Hashem is *Asah, Oseh, v’Yaaseh*. What is done – is done – by Hashem. There is nothing more to be done. Do not look back.

In *Kohelles Rabbah* (16:21), Rabbi Meir teaches, “When a person comes into this world, his fists are clenched as if to say, ‘The entire world is mine; I will inherit it.’ But when he departs the world, his hands are open as if to say, ‘I did not inherit anything from this world.’” Rav Galinsky supplements this, applying the above idea. When a person enters the world, he thinks that he will conquer, control, create and do whatever he wants. When he leaves the world, he realizes that it was really Hashem Who did everything. We must endeavor to do what we can and to accept what will be.

והאלקים נסה את אברהם

G-d tested Avraham. (22:1)

Avraham *Avinu* and his son, Yitzchak (*Avinu*), merited to achieve the highest level of serving Hashem: *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*, sanctifying Hashem’s Name, with their preparedness to slaughter and be slaughtered for the sake of Hashem. In the end, Hashem dispatched a heavenly angel to instruct Avraham to desist. Heaven neither requires, nor encourages, human sacrifice. It is far better (and probably more difficult) to live a life of *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem, in our every demeanor, our every action, than to die for him.

The *Baal HaTanya* writes that in order to sanctify Hashem’s Name, it is not necessary to give up one’s life. Rather, living an exalted life of *Kiddush Shem Shomayim* is far more acceptable. We were sent down to this world to live, to glorify Hashem’s Name. If circumstances demand – as they have throughout our tumultuous history – then, if necessary, we give up our lives for Him. The *Bais HaLevi* uses this idea (*kiddush ha’chaim*, sanctifying life) to explain why the *Akeidah*, Binding of Yitzchak, is considered Avraham *Avinu’s nisayon*, trial, rather than Yitzchak’s. It was Yitzchak who stretched out his neck to be slaughtered. He was the one who was prepared to die. He had a whole life ahead of him. He was not yet married and able to establish his legacy. To give it all up requires superhuman courage and devotion. Yet, his *nisayon* is viewed as secondary to that of Avraham.

The *Bais HaLevi* explains that while Yitzchak was willing to give up his life, it was a one-time test. Once he passed the test, it was over, because his life would be over. Avraham, on the other hand, was relegated to live with his decision to sacrifice Yitzchak. The pain and suffering that he would endure was beyond belief. In addition, he would have to return home and explain to Sarah *Imeinu* what he did and why. He would have to face the community, his many students who probably could not understand his actions, and would look at him askance. Actually, by remaining alive under such conditions, Avraham would be dying a thousand times.

The survivors that were spared from the Nazis’ Final Solution sanctified Hashem’s Name in this manner. They returned to what was left of their towns and villages. In some communities, only a handful returned; in some, it was only one; and, in some, no one returned. After sustaining such a *potch*, “slap”, from Hashem, after experiencing the most inhuman atrocities, it was a wonder that they returned sane. They went one step further. They returned fully committed, with their faith in Hashem intact and their determination to rebuild the Jewish People stronger than ever. This is *kiddush ha’chaim*. We are tested every day and with every step that we take. We do not know what the next moment will bring. Yet, we go about our lives with deeply rooted devotion to Hashem. *Kiddush ha’chaim*.

והאלקים נסה את אברהם ויאמר אליו אברהם ויאמר הנני

G-d tested Avraham and said to him, “Avraham,” and he replied, “Here I am.” (22:1)

Hashem called to Avraham *Avinu* and the Patriarch’s immediate response was, *Hineni*, “Here I am.” Hashem told him, “By your life, with that very expression (*hineni*), I will issue a reward to your descendants,” as it says, *Hineni, mamtir lechem min ha’Shomayim*, “Behold! I will rain down for you bread from Heaven” (*Shemos* 16:4). In another place, *Chazal* teach that the actual *manna* was in the merit of Moshe *Rabbeinu’s* response, *Hineni*, when Hashem called out to him from the *s’neh*, burning bush

(*Shemos* 2:4). We see from here the incredible value of, and merit derived, from saying (and meaning), *Hineni*. While this word is translated as, “I am ready and willing to do whatever You ask,” there must be a deeper meaning to lend greater significance to *hineni*.

Chazal (*Pirkei Avos* 2:4) teach, *Bateil retzonecha mipnei retzono*, “Negate your will before His.” Simply, this means that when one finds his will clashing with the views and directives of the Torah, undo yours, let it dissipate, and instead submit to the will of Hashem. Is this what *hineni* means? Does, “Here I am,” mean submission? I think *hineni* goes one step further. When one responds, *hineni*, he intimates that he has no will at all. He is one with Hashem, and he has no selfhood. He wants whatever Hashem wants. He does not just agree – he wants it! The selflessness of Avraham and Moshe set the stage for the manner in which their descendants would serve Hashem. As far as our service to Hashem is concerned, the only will that we have is His will. We do not agree or acquiesce; we have no will of our own.

This does not mean that we go along and play our parts as submissive Jews. Absolutely not. We must manifest the same will, passion, and drive that we normally have for executing our personal endeavors in the way in which we serve Hashem. We should be excited and enthusiastic to carry out His will.

Reb Yitzchak (*Irving Bunim*, *zl*), relates an anecdote that is pertinent to and underscores this idea. A man left his family in Poland, while he traveled to a distant country in search of means to support his wife and family. He was quite successful, and, over time, he amassed a small fortune - \$100,000. (This took place many years ago when such an amount of money was considered a small fortune.) Unfortunately, his success would be short-lived, as he became gravely ill, and the doctors despaired for his life. Understanding that the end was imminent, he sought a way to send the money back to his wife in Poland. No banks or wire transfers were available. He would have to be creative. He heard that a neighbor was traveling to Poland. The neighbor gave the impression of being honest. It was not as if the man had a plethora of choices. He would have to take his chances.

He told the man, “Please take my money back to Poland. Take for yourself what you want and give my wife what you want.” The man returned to Poland and, not wanting someone else’s money burning in his pocket, repeated to his wife the exact words he heard from her husband and continued, “I have decided to keep for myself \$90,000 for my troubles and to give you \$10,000.” The wife became enraged, “How dare you take so much of my husband’s hard-earned money?” The man countered, “I am following your husband’s instructions.” The woman took him to a *din Torah*, halachic litigation, before the *Rav* of the community. He listened to both sides, then asked the man to repeat verbatim the instructions which her husband

had given him. The man spoke slowly and carefully, “He said, ‘Take for yourself what you want and give my wife what you want.’”

“If that is the case,” the *Rav* said, “give her the \$90,000 and you keep the \$10,000.” “Why?” the man cried out. “I did exactly what I was told to do.”

“Not exactly,” said the *Rav*. “You were charged with giving her the amount that you wanted. This means: Give her the amount of money that you want for yourself, which is \$90,000. That is what you want. Now, give what you want to her.”

We must imbue the same fervor and enthusiasm in our *avodas ha'kodesh*, service to the Almighty, that we manifest when we are acting on our own behalf.

וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי בְנִי

And he (Yitzchak) said, “Father,” and he (Avraham) said, “Here I am, my son.” (22:7)

The dialogue between Yitzchak (*Avinu*) and Avraham *Avinu* seems superfluous. What does this exchange between father and child add to the narrative? The *Melitzer Rebbe*, *Shlita*, explains that when a Jew is in distress, when he is undergoing a physical, emotional or spiritual hardship, all he needs to do is cry out, “*Abba, Tatte!*” The cry should emanate from the innermost recesses of his being. When one does this sincerely, Hashem responds, *Hineni*, “I am here, my son.” Furthermore, even if a Jew is unable to articulate his request properly, to convey the hardship that is overtaking and overwhelming him, the cry of *Abba* will suffice.

What a powerful thought. In *Parashas Mishpatim* (*Shemos* 22:26), the Torah writes concerning the poor man who needs the collateral he gave his lender to be returned to him at night, *V'hayah ki yitzaak Eilai v'shomaati ki chanun ani*, “And it will be that if he cries out to Me, I shall listen, for I am compassionate.” When a person cries with sincerity, Hashem listens because He is a compassionate Father. As a father does not (should not) distinguish between the son who follows in his religious beliefs and the one who is wrestling with religious challenges, so, too, does Hashem not distinguish between Jews. When a Jew/child cries out, his religious persuasion does not determine Hashem’s listening quotient. He is our Heavenly Father.

Horav Mordechai Pogremansky, zl, was a brilliant *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, whose erudition was eclipsed only by his *emunah* in Hashem. *Rav Mottel* (as he was endearingly called) walked into the *bais hamedrash* in Versailles, France (following World War II where a number of Holocaust survivors had gathered), and stood before a group of young men, ranging in age from 15 to 30 years old. These men were in transit, only there to rebuild their shattered lives, either in *Eretz Yisrael* or America. He stood before them, but he was in his own little world.

Rav Mottel began to speak to Hashem, as they listened into the “conversation.” *Oy Tatte in Himmel, es iz*

nisht da kein ghetto, nisht da kein tatte, nisht da kein mamme, nisht da kein shtoob; nisht da kein mishpacha; nahr ein zach is gebliben: Es iz nohr Du un ich. “Oy, Father in Heaven! There is no ghetto, no father, no mother, no home, no family. Only one thing remains: You and I. It is just You and I.” These words were repeated over and over as he stood in a world far removed from the *bais hamedrash*, and the young men who were there, staring at him, enthralled by his otherworldly presence.

He finished speaking. Then he closed his eyes for a few moments, deep in thought. For five minutes, the students watched him. Then ten minutes. Finally, after fifteen minutes had elapsed, they realized that *Rav Mottel*’s body may be standing in front of them, but his soul, his psyche, was in a place distant from this edifice. He was with Hashem. Having realized that all that he once had – family and home – were gone, he only had Hashem: *Du un ich*. You and I. This is all any of us really have. Sadly, we often do not realize this verity until we have exhausted all other avenues. Hashem is always there with us.

Horav Yisrael. zl, m’Shklov was one of the *Gaon, zl, m’Vilna*’s premier *talmidim*, disciples. As such, he led the third *aliyah* of the *Talmidei Ha’Gra (Perushim)* to *Eretz Yisrael* in 1810. *Rav Yisrael* was not just a *talmid*, he was also very close to his revered *Rebbe*, having attended to him in the final weeks of his life. He brought his intrepid group of settlers to Tzfas with the hope of establishing a strong Jewish community there. The poverty, however, was so intense that *Rav Yisrael* took it upon himself to return to Europe on a fundraising trip to support the hardy and brave Jews who had taken the initiative to live in the Holy Land, despite the physical hardships that it might entail. They knew that nothing of value comes easily, and that, after they established the community, life would return to normalcy.

Adversity was almost an accepted way of life for these emigres. In 1814 the Galil (of which Tzfas is a part) was struck by a terrible plague. The five hundred *Perushim* who lived in Tzfas deserted their homes in search of safe haven. *Rav Yisrael*, who had recently returned from his fundraising venture, was not spared the ill effects of this plague. He, too, left Tzfas, with Yerushalayim as his destination. Tragedy struck along the way when his wife succumbed to the plague. By the time he reached the gates of Yerushalayim, he had buried most of his children and he, too, had been stricken with the plague.

His health troubled him only because he knew that the future wellbeing of the community was riding upon him. He prayed to Hashem that he be spared, so that he could continue his *Rebbe*’s lofty goals. He had lost his wife, daughters, sons and sons-in-law, as well as his parents. His daughter, Sheindel, a young girl, lay ill beside him burning with fever. He writes: “I was lying there weeping bitterly, throwing myself about, pleading before our Father in Heaven to spare my Sheindel. My sorrow was

great.” He vowed to Hashem that if his daughter would be spared and he would live, he would write a comprehensive *sefer* on *Hilchos Eretz Yisrael*, the laws pertaining to the Holy Land. In the preface to this volume, entitled, *Pe’as HaShulchan*, he writes: “I wept until I was overcome with sleep. I dreamt that I was approached by someone who put his hand on me. I then awoke, well-rested, as if from a long night’s sleep. This “being” stood over me and said, ‘You have been stricken and now you have been healed.’ I then felt Hashem’s compassion and loving kindness shine upon me, and I knew that I would survive.” His Father in Heaven had responded affirmatively to his plea.

I just came across the following inspirational story. A young couple, members of the Satmar community, had not yet been blessed with their own biological offspring. After a number of years visiting fertility specialists, participating in countless procedures and tests, they decided that the time had come to seriously consider adoption. They went to a bonafide agency and filed the forms. Now, the next hurdle was to meet with a social worker who would speak with them and decide if they were fit to be parents.

The social worker began the meeting by asking the husband to write on a piece of paper what/who he loves more than anything in the world. There was no question in his mind. He wrote, *Der Eibishter*, “The Almighty.” Afterwards, she turned to his wife and asked her to write down what she loved most. She wrote, *Abba she’ba’Shomayim*, “Father in Heaven.” (The social worker was very devoted to her work, to the point that she did not cognitively process anything; she did not think on her own. She just followed the instructions she was given. Had she used her common sense, she would have realized that the young *Chassidic* couple that stood before her was different and had different values than the usual people that sought her help.)

“Now,” the social worker said, “I must ask you to qualify what you wrote. If you were given a child, if our agency deemed you worthy of raising one of our children available for adoption, would you love the child more than what you wrote on the pad of paper?” (The woman neither knew what they had written on the paper, nor did she inquire about it.) The question seemed legitimate. They both responded, “No.” (In other words, their love of Hashem superseded all else.) “I warn you that a negative response quite possibly will undermine your efforts to adopt. We cannot place a child in a home in which the prospective parents will not place their love of the child over everything else.” They replied that come what may, they were not inclined to change their response.

One year later, the young couple was blessed with the birth of twins; a boy and a girl. They had demonstrated their overriding, abiding love for their Father in Heaven and were rewarded in kind.

Va’ani Tefillah

אשרי יושבי ביתך – Ashrei yoshvei veisecha.

The *Yesod V'Shores Ha'Avodah*, quotes the *Zohar HaKadosh* who teaches that reciting *Tehillah l'David (Ashrei)* after *Shemoneh Esrai* is a greater obligation than reciting it during *Pesukei d'Zimra*. (In other words, the second *Ashrei* holds greater significance than the first *Ashrei*.) Therefore, a person should take great care to be meticulous in reciting it properly with the appropriate *kavanah*, intention. Unfortunately (continues the *Yesod V'Shores Ha'Avodah*), we see that people ignore the seriousness of this *tefillah (Ashrei u'va l'Tzion)*. Although these same individuals pray passionately and with great fervor, when it comes to the conclusion of *Shacharis*, they no longer have patience. Some fly through the words, while others just find this to be a convenient time to leave the *shul*. This is a practice that unintentionally dishonors the prayer.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dearfather and grandfather

יצחק בן נחום ישראל ז"ל - נפטר ח' חשוון -
תשל"ט

Neil and Marie Genshaft

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Basar Bechalav

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In this week's parsha, Avraham Avinu serves his guests milchig and then fleishig...

Question #1: The Case of the Desperate Chef!

"I am frantically looking for a job. May I work in the kitchen of a KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken)? What if I have to flip cheeseburgers?"

Question #2: The Last Lapp

"I am in northern Norway, herding reindeer, and I want to know whether doe milk is kosher and milchig?"

Question #3: May I Smoke?

"May I smoke meat and dairy together?"

Introduction:

In three places the Torah teaches *lo sevashel gedi bachaleiv imo*, "Do not cook a kid in the milk of its mother." We all know that halacha prohibits eating milk and meat together and requires waiting after eating meat, before eating dairy. These latter are prohibited only *miderabbanan*, unless the meat and milk were cooked together.

Three and over

The Gemara (Chullin 115b) notes that the thrice mentioning of the Torah's prohibition can be violated three different ways, by (1) cooking, (2) eating the cooked milk-meat mixture or by (3) benefiting from this mixture.

Although we should be and are careful to observe all details of halacha, whether obligated *min haTorah* or *miderabbanan*, we are required to know whether a particular observance is Torah law or is only a rabbinic

injunction (see Avos Derabbi Nosson Chapter 1:7 with commentary of Binyan Yehoshua). In the case of *basar bechalav*, there is an additional reason to know whether something is prohibited *min haTorah* or because of rabbinic injunction. The prohibitions against cooking *basar becholov* and benefiting from it apply only to meat and milk that violate the law *min haTorah*. When the meat or the milk is prohibited because of a rabbinic injunction, the prohibition is limited to consumption of the product, not to cooking or benefiting from it (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 87:3; Rema, Yoreh Deah 87:1 and commentaries in both places; cf. Yam shel Shelomoh, Chullin, 8:100, who disagrees, but whose opinion is not accepted by the later authorities). Please bear in mind that, as always, the purpose of our article is to educate, and not to pasken; that is the responsibility of each individual's *rav* or *posek*.

Therefore, if meat and dairy were mixed together when cold, there is no prohibition of benefiting from the product. For this reason, it is not a violation of the law of benefiting from *basar becholov* to sell bagged pet food, even when it contains both meat and dairy products, since they are not cooked together, but mixed together at room temperature.

We will soon see that there is much halachic discussion as to which animal species are included in the prohibition, both *min haTorah* and *miderabbanan*, and which types of food preparation or cooking are included. Most of these laws are derived from the unusual way that the written Torah teaches this *mitzvah*.

When teaching about most *ma'achalos asuros*, prohibited food items, the Torah usually states, in a very straightforward way, that something "may not be eaten." In the instance of *basar becholov*, the Torah does not say this, but simply commands not to cook *kid's* meat in its mother's milk. Therefore, we derive that only meat and milk "cooked" together is prohibited *min haTorah*, and only from species similar to goats.

Fowl play

There is a dispute among *tanna'im* whether the prohibition of *basar becholov* applies only to mammals or also to fowl. The conclusion is that the Torah prohibition of *basar becholov* does not apply to fowl, since they never have any type of "mother's milk." Milk is limited to mammals, not to avian creatures. Nevertheless, according to most *tanna'im*, Chazal prohibited consumption of milk and poultry. According to one *tanna*, Rabbi Yosi Hagalili, it is permitted, even *miderabbanan*, to eat milk together with poultry, even if they are cooked together (Chullin 116a). In his opinion, you may cook and serve your favorite chicken-in-cheese-sauce recipe. We have Talmudic statements that demonstrate that, in the era of the Mishnah, there were still communities that permitted eating poultry cooked in milk (Shabbos 130a; Yevamos 14a; Chullin 116a). However, since the time of the Gemara, Rabbi Yosi Hagalili's opinion is not accepted, so eating chicken prepared this way is prohibited, and the pots and other equipment used to

prepare and serve poultry cooked in milk become treif and require kashering to return them to kosher use.

The desperate chef!

At this point, let us examine the first part of our opening question: “I am frantically looking for a job. May I work in the kitchen of a KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken)?”

There is a kashrus issue here: KFC’s breeding includes dairy ingredients. Several years ago, a kosher branch of KFC was opened in Israel and required a specially formulated breeding to be certified kosher and pareve. (The breeding mix manufactured for KFC’s other locations was kosher and dairy, although we well understand why the company never requested kashrus certification for it.)

Since consuming poultry cooked with dairy is prohibited only *miderabbanan*, it is permitted to cook poultry with dairy. However, there is another halachic issue here -- it is prohibited *lechatchilah* to seek earnings from foodstuffs prohibited *min haTorah*, such as non-shechted poultry. I would suggest that Desperate seek alternative employment better suited to a nice Jewish boy.

Non-kosher species

Since the Torah describes the prohibition as referring to “a kid in the milk of its mother,” the halacha is that only kosher species are included in the prohibition, since “kid,” *gedi* in Hebrew, usually means only baby sheep and baby goats, although, upon occasion, the word can refer also to calves (Chullin 113b).

Where the deer and the antelope roam

Reindeer are a kosher species and are milked in places where they are herded and raised as cattle, such as in northern Europe, including Lapland and northern Scandinavia. The Torah prohibition of *basar becholov* is limited to eating the flesh (also known as the meat) of a kosher animal that is categorized as a *beheimah* that was cooked in the milk of a *beheimah*, but does not include either the milk or the meat of a *chayah*. When either the meat or the milk is of a *chayah*, the prohibition to consume the mixture is only *miderabbanan*.

It is difficult to define the differences between *beheimah* and *chayah*. Although we know that *beheimah* includes cattle and sheep, whereas *chayah* includes deer and antelope, the common definition of *beheimah* as “domesticated kosher species,” and *chayah* as “beast,” “non-domesticated” or “wild species” is not halachically accurate. For example, reindeer, which qualify as *chayah*, are domesticated, whereas wisents, Cape buffalo, bighorn sheep and Dell’s sheep, none of which is domesticated, are probably varieties of *beheimah*.

A more accurate description of *beheimah* is a genus or category in which most common species qualify as livestock, and *chayah* is a genus or category in which most common species are usually not livestock.

The halachic definitions of *beheimah* and *chayah* are dependent on the type of horn or antlers that the animal proudly displays. However, the terminology used by the

Gemara to explain this is subject to disputes among the *rishonim*, and, therefore, the accepted halachic practice is to treat any species of which we have no *mesorah* whether it is a *chayah* or a *beheimah* as a *safek* in both directions (see Shach, Yoreh Deah 82:1 and commentaries thereon). This is why bison (American buffalo) is treated with the stringencies of both *beheimah* and *chayah*, notwithstanding that its horns seem to fit the description of a *beheimah*. Don’t cook your bison burgers in milk!

Last Lapp

At this point, we can address the next of our opening questions: “I am in northern Norway, herding reindeer, and I want to know whether doe milk is kosher and *milchig*?”

The answer is that it is not *milchig min haTorah*, but *miderabbanan* it is considered *milchig*. Therefore, a Jew may not eat reindeer venison cooked in milk, nor may he eat beef, veal or lamb cooked in reindeer milk. However, it is permitted to cook meat with reindeer milk or cheese, or cook reindeer venison with cow’s, sheep’s or goat’s milk or cheese. It is also permitted to benefit from any of these preparations.

So our frum Lapp may cook and sell venison cooked in reindeer milk, if he shechted the reindeer first. If there is a market for such products in Lapland, perhaps Desperate should be in touch with him! But, remember that a Jew may not eat this product, because of rabbinic injunction.

Cheese

Since we mentioned cheese, I will add that, according to most authorities, cow’s, buffalo’s, sheep’s and goat’s cheese are *milchig min haTorah*. There is a minority opinion that holds that, just as lactose, a dairy by-product, is *milchig* only *miderabbanan* (a topic upon which I have written a different essay), so cheese is, also, *milchig* only *miderabbanan*. However, the vast majority of later authorities reject this position (see *Yalkut Yosef*, *Isur Vaheter*, Volume III, page 114).

Marinating

As I mentioned above, the prohibitions of eating cold meat and milk together or eating dairy shortly after consuming meat are only *miderabbanan*. The prohibition of *lo sevashel gedi bachaleiv* imo is violated *min haTorah* only by cooking meat and dairy together or by eating meat and dairy that were previously cooked together.

There are many methods of making food edible and very tasty that do not use heat, including salting, pickling and marinating. Preparing food this way causes the flavors of the different ingredients to blend together, which halacha calls *beli’ah*. When one ingredient is, on its own, non-kosher, everything salted, pickled or marinated together has now become non-kosher. If the kashrus prohibition is *min haTorah*, such as, meat that was not shechted, non-kosher fat (*cheilev*), blood, or non-kosher species, the other food that was salted, pickled or marinated together has also become non-kosher *min haTorah*.

However, since *lo sevashel gedi bachaleiv imo* includes only cooking meat and milk together, there is no prohibition to marinate or salt meat and milk together. The product manufactured this way may not be eaten, but only because of a rabbinic injunction (see *Nazir 37a*; *Pesachim 44b*). Furthermore, there is no prohibition, even *miderabbanan*, in manufacturing or in benefiting from this mixture (*Rema, Yoreh Deah 87:1*).

Grilling

At this point, we can examine the second part of Desperate's question, which opened our essay. "What if I have to grill cheeseburgers?" These products are not cooked in liquid, but are grilled. Is grilling, frying or broiling included in the Torah violation of cooking milk and meat together?

From the way Rashi and Tosafos explain the passage of Gemara in *Sanhedrin 4b*, it appears that frying dairy and meat together is not prohibited *min haTorah*. There is also strong evidence that the Ran (Commentary to Rif, Chullin, Chapter 8, on the Mishnah 108a c.v. *Tipas chalav*) held a similar, if not identical, approach. If this opinion is halachically correct, Desperate could work in a restaurant that uses kosher meat to make its cheeseburgers.

However, many authorities conclude that cooking *basar becholov* using any type of heat is prohibited *min haTorah* (*Pri Chadash, Yoreh Deah, 87:2*; *Peleisi 87:2*; *Chachmas Adam 40:1*). According to this approach, grilling cheeseburgers will land Desperate in hot water.

Other prominent authorities rule that consuming *basar becholov* prepared in these ways is prohibited only by rabbinic injunction (*Maharam Shiff* (commentary, end of *Mesechta Chullin*; *Pri Megadim*, introduction to *Basar Bechalav, s.v. Vehinei*). And then, there are some authorities that draw distinctions among the various methods of cooking with heat. For example, *Rav Yaakov Reisch*, a very prominent early eighteenth-century posek, rules that roasting (which presumably includes broiling and grilling) is prohibited *min haTorah*, but frying is not (*Soles Lamincha, Klal 85:3*). This approach is based on his analysis of the *pesukim* and the passages of the Gemara, but without explaining any reason for the distinction, other than the usage of the word *bishul*. (See also *Shu't Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #97*, who has yet another approach to the topic.) Other prominent authorities reach the same conclusion (*Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 87:1*). Among the late authorities, this issue is left as an unresolved dispute. Therefore, the halachic assumption is that we should be *machmir* in all of these disputed areas.

May I smoke?

At this point, we can explore the third of our opening questions: "May I smoke meat and dairy together?"

To the best of my knowledge, smoking meat and dairy is not addictive, contains no nicotine, and does not cause emphysema. The question is whether it violates the laws of *basar becholov*. In answer to the halachic question, it

appears to have been discussed in a passage of Talmud Yerushalmi (*Nedorim 6:1*): "The rabbis of Kisrin asked: What is the law of smoked food, in regard to the prohibition of *bishul akum*? Concerning cooking on Shabbos? What is its law regarding mixing meat and milk together?" The passage of Yerushalmi then changes the subject, without ruling on any of the three questions, something not unusual in the Talmud Yerushalmi.

Based on this unresolved question, the Rambam (*Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros 9:6*) appears to rule that the issue is treated as a *safek*, a doubt, with the following conclusions: When our issue [of whether something is considered cooking] is a *halacha* that is *min haTorah*, we rule stringently. However, someone who violated this act would not be punished, since it remains unresolved whether this is indeed prohibited *min haTorah*. However, when the issue is a rabbinic question, we rule leniently and do not consider smoking to be cooking.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah 87:6*) follows the same approach as the Rambam. Since the issue of whether it is permitted to smoke dairy and meat together is of Torah law, we rule stringently and forbid it.

The *Pri Chadash* (*Yoreh Deah 87:2,3*) and the *Gra* (*Yoreh Deah 87:13*) conclude that, although the Yerushalmi passage in *Nedorim* quoted above did not render a decision whether smoking qualifies as cooking or not, a passage of Talmud Yerushalmi in *mesechta Shabbos* does conclude that smoking is considered cooking. Therefore, they rule that smoking meat and dairy together is definitely prohibited *min haTorah*, and that the resultant food is certainly prohibited for benefit, *min haTorah*. Although several later authorities agree with the conclusion of the Rambam and the *Shulchan Aruch*, according to both approaches it is prohibited to smoke meat and dairy together. The practical dispute between the two opinions involves only more esoteric issues, such as whether the violator can still be a kosher witness.

Heavy smoker

We should note that the terms "smoking food" or "smoked food" can mean several different ways of manufacturing. The presumed case of the Talmud Yerushalmi is similar to the processing today of frankfurters and many other sausages, which are "cooked" in smoke, often in an appliance called a smoker. Rather than being cooked directly by the fire, or by water that is heated by fire, these foods are cooked by hot smoke. This is also a common way raw salmon is processed into lox.

Cured smoker

There is another method of preparing food that involves smoke, but where the food, itself, is processed without heat. Wood is burned inside a sealed room called a "smokehouse." The food to be smoked is placed inside the smokehouse for several days or weeks, while the smoke, now cool, cures the food, providing it with a smoky flavor. Since the food production in this instance takes place in

ambient temperature, this process should not be considered “cooking” for basar becholov purposes (see Perisha, Yoreh Deah 87:9). Therefore, the finished product is prohibited for consumption only midrabbanan, and there is no prohibition to cure meat and dairy together using this method or to benefit from the product. Thus, Desperate could engage in this line of work. We should note that there is one late authority who considers this method of producing food to be similar to cooking (Chadrei Deah, quoted by Badei Hashulchan, Biurim 87:6, s.v. Ha’me’ushan), but, to the best of my knowledge, this approach is rejected by all other authorities.

Smoke flavored

There is a modern method of providing “smoke flavor” to food that involves preparing food by steaming, cooking or broiling, and smoke flavor, a natural or synthetic ingredient, is added to provide smoke taste. Whether this is prohibited min haTorah or midrabbanan when processing

meat and dairy together will depend on which method is used, and also on the above-mentioned disputes among halachic authorities. I do not recommend that Desperate seek employment in a firm that does this.

Conclusion

A well-known, non-Jewish criticism of Judaism is: “Does G-d care more about what goes into our mouths than He does about what comes out?” The criticism is, of course, both mistaken and conceited. Our development as avdei Hashem involves both what goes in and what comes out, and the height of vanity is to decide which is “more” important in His eyes. Being careful about what we eat and about what we say is a vital step in our growth as human beings.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה