

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON PARSHAS VAYEIRAH - 5757

B'S'D'

stopping to greet anyone or return a greeting and place his walking stick on the child. The Shunamite woman was skeptical of Gaychazi ability to perform Techias Hamaysim with Elisha's staff and she refused to leave Elisha's side and made him accompany home. If not for her insisting on Elisha's coming back with her, Elisha would have been content to allow Gaychazi to do the job himself. (Apparently the woman had greater insight into the true character of Gaychazi and realized that alone he would be of no help.)

The Navi begins with the miracle of the oil filling all the empty vessels to relieve the debt and provide for the living expenses of the wife of the prophet who was killed. We derive from his words, that Elisha was closely connected to the royal house. Likewise, Eliyahu was able to approach Achav directly in a familiar way. Despite this closeness, we do not find that Elisha or Eliyahu performed miracles for the king. Both Eliyahu and Elisha were granted the power of Techias Hamaysim, which is one of the great keys that Hashem reserves to Himself (Attah Gibbor L'Olam Hashem Mechaye Maysim Attah...) Not even Moshe was given this ability. We do not find that they used this great gift for the benefit of the king. Rather, both of them used it to help poor and down trodden families. In fact, we know little about the people that they helped beyond some description of where they came from (in Eliyahu's case it was a woman from Tzorfas, which we are not sure of its location, and in Elisha's case a Shunamite woman). We don't even know their names. The Navi is emphasizing the greatness of their deeds precisely by emphasizing the type of person they chose to help. The greatest kindness that can be done is to help an individual in time of crisis. The more obscure the individual, the greater the act. The Yachid always suffers more than the Tzibbur, hence the kindness expressed towards him is more highly praised.

The story of the oil that filled all the available vessels is another example of the special quality of the prophets and leaders of Bnay Yisrael to help the individual. Elisha could have used the miracle of the flowing oil to benefit all of the people and wipe out poverty among the populace at large. Yet he chose to help an individual in dire need. The Rav pointed out that the Gedolei Yisrael throughout the ages were always ready to help the Tzibbur in times of need, however they never pushed aside the needs of the individual. In fact they tended to help the individual more than the Tzibbur.

This attribute of helping the individual is a tradition among Gedolei Yisrael that dates back to Avraham. At the beginning of the Parsha we find that Avraham excused himself from Hashem in order to help a few individual travelers. The Midrash (Yalkut on Chayei Sarah 91) quotes Rav Chanan Bar Rava in the name of Rav that when Avraham died all the nations of the world stood in a row and cried out "Woe to the world that has lost its leader and woe to the ship that has lost its navigator". Why was it necessary to reenforce the statement that described the sorrow the world felt on losing its leader. What did the statement about the navigator add? The Rav explained that while Avraham was truly the leader of the Tzibbur, he never lost sight of the individual. Avraham was the lead navigator who was able to steer around the small boats in the sea and to guide other boats around him. He worried about the individual. When Lot was captured, he worried about him and went to battle to rescue him. Even though Lot had rejected Hashem (as Rashi points out that Lot said I do not want to be burdened with Avraham or with his Gd), Avraham still felt responsibility for him and saved him. He showed the same love for the Tzibbur as well as the individual. Moshe, who was the prime example of a leader who cared for the Tzibbur, cared equally for the individual as well, as evidenced by his personal involvement with Bnos Tzafchad - the individual. This is also the story of Eliyahu and Elisha. They also cared for the Tzibbur and especially the individual.

The Rav then turned his attention to Gaychazi and why he was judged so harshly to be included in the few who were denied Olam Haba. The episode with Naaman where he inappropriately demanded money from him indicated his character flaw that was the underlying reason for his rejection. The story of Gaychazi revolves around what qualifies a person to assume leadership of his generation.

We must understand the formation of a leader and his association with the leader who precedes him. For example, Yehoshua, who served Moshe, started out like anyone else. By dedicating himself to be the Meshares of Moshe he

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Rabbi Leibtag noted last week: "As I noted on the attached shiur, this is my last week of parsha on the yhe-parsha list. I am taking a partial sabbatical this year, and plan to start work on a comprehensive Tanach study program which will focus on developing educational material..." See <http://www.virtual.co.il/torah/tanach/> - MACHON AVRAHAM PROJECT In memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag THE TANACH STUDY CENTER SHIURIM ON CHUMASH AND NAVI BY **RABBI MENACHEM LEIBTAG, INCLUDING: THIS WEEK'S SHIURIM; THE SHIURIM ARCHIVE by SEFER/PARSHA; JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND SPECIAL TOPICS ...**

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Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZTL on Parshas Vayera

The Rav examined the connection between the Haftorah and the Parsha. The obvious connection between them is that both Sarah and the Shunamite woman were childless and that both were promised, in extremely similar terms, that they would bear a child a year to the day from the prophesy.

However the connection between the Parsha and the miracle of the flowing oil, and Gaychazi, the attendant of Elisha, requires explanation.

Chazal tell us that Gaychazi is one of three commoners who were denied Olam Haba, the others being Achitofel (who advised Abshalom to kill his father, King David) and Doag Ha'adomi (who murdered the (kohanim) residents of Nov. We must understand why was Gaychazi punished so harshly for the sin of asking for money from Naaman when he should not have done so.

We find that Elisha entrusted Gaychazi with the role of Techias Hamaysim when he told him to go directly to the home of the Shunamite woman without

grew into the next leader of B'nei Yisrael. Elisha was a simple farmer when he came across Eliyahu. He became the Meshares Shel Eliyahu and ultimately reached greater heights, in certain respects, than Eliyahu. For example he requested and received a double portion of Nevuah granted to Eliyahu. Our entire tradition is based on this Rebbe/Talmid relationship. The true Talmid is Meshares his teacher. As Chazal tell us Gedolah Shimusho Shel Talmidei Chachamim Yoser M'Limudo, one derives a greater reward by attending their teacher than from the direct study of Torah. Elisha is the source for this statement as it says Asher Yatzak Mayim Al Yeday Eliyahu (Kings 2:3:11). Chazal comment that it does not mention that Elisha was great because he studied Torah from Eliyahu, but rather specified the source of his greatness as his serving Eliyahu. Hearing a lecture from a Rebbe is not the ultimate in a Rebbe/Talmid relationship: one must absorb the the personality of his teacher, his attributes and deeds.

The Rav noted that Reb Chaim Volozner is considered the Talmid Muvhak of the Vilna Gaon. Reb Chaim did not hear shiurim from the Gaon, yet he was his Meshares and absorbed the Gaon's personality. Chasidim certainly evidence this concept of Shimush relative to their Rebbe. The Rav pointed out that Misnagdim also have this trait (but they also learn a shiur in the process!).

The Meshares becomes a student and eventually takes over from the Rebbe/Manhig. Elisha hoped that Gaychazi would follow in his footsteps and eventually become his student and succeed him as leader. Unfortunately the sanctity of Elisha's personality did not rub off on Gaychazi. Naaman realized the magnitude of the miracle performed by Elisha and was moved to convert to Judaism. At that moment all Gaychazi could think of was money. This unwillingness to absorb the Kedushas Elisha was the reason for his being denied Olam Haba. Gaychazi had the abilities to become a great leader, but he squandered his opportunity and did not develop into one.

The Chachmei Kabbalah say that had the chain of leadership passed from Eliyahu to Elisha to Gaychazi the Beis Hamikdash would never have been destroyed. Elisha's death without the succession of leadership by his attendant heralded the diminishing of the eternity of the leadership among the people and led to the Churban Bayis. Elisha transferred his mantle of leadership to Yehoyada Hakohen, not his attendant Gaychazi. Had Gaychazi developed properly, Jewish History would have unfolded differently.

The Haftorah that we read points out the Elisha gave Gaychazi one last chance to prove himself worthy. He did this by giving him a most difficult assignment, one that the student himself feels that he is incapable of accomplishing. By doing so, the teacher tells the student that he believes in him and tries to build up the student's self confidence. Elisha told Gaychazi to go on his own, without the help of Elisha, to the home of the Shunamite woman. He told Gaychazi that within you lies the ability to do what I can do, to revive the dead. However there was one stipulation to Gaychazi accomplishing such a monumental task: he had to carry out the task in a humble way, without telling anyone about the great act he was about to perform. Had he complied with Elisha's command, he would have performed the miracle of Techias Hamaysim himself. Gaychazi would have proven himself worthy to succeed Elisha and Jewish History would have followed a different, perhaps less tragic, course.

Chazal tell us that Gaychazi told everyone he met that he was on his way to perform the miracle of Techias Hamaysim: he, not Elisha, was now in charge. When Elisha arrived at the house, it was already full of the curious on-lookers that Gaychazi attracted. Elisha saw that Gaychazi had not complied with his commands and was not worthy of leadership. Gaychazi would not succeed him.

Avraham preached Emunah B'Hashem to many, many people. However, it was only Yitzchak who had the sensitivity of soul to develop his father's teaching and to continue on in the faith that he learned from his father. He was a worthy student and successor as Manhig Yisrael.

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Ravfrand@torah.org (Rabbi Yissocher Frand) "RavFrand" on Parshas Vayera

Because Avraham Ran, Israel Received the Torah

The pasuk [verse] says "And G-d appeared to him in Elonei Mamre." This is a strange construction. Rather than saying "G-d appeared to Avraham," the Torah uses the pronoun and says "G-d appeared to him." If that is the case, it seems that this parsha is directly linked to the parsha that immediately precedes it. Who is 'him'? 'Him' refers to Avraham, who just underwent the act of circumcision (at the end of Lech Lecha).

There are a number of interesting Medrashim on the topic of this 'Hachnasas Orchim' that Avraham provided for the Angels.

The Medrash Rabbah says, "In the merit of the three times that you ran to serve the Angels, I will 'run' three times during the Giving of the Torah that I will give to your children." This is the first indication that there is a strong connection between the chapter of hosting the Angels and the fact that we merited to receive the Torah.

We see an even stronger connection in the Gemara in Shabbos [88b], which says that when Moshe Rabbeinu came up to receive the Torah, the Angels protested, "What is one born to a woman doing amongst us?" The Medrash in Parshas Yisro says that G-d caused the facial appearance of Moshe look like that of Avraham. G-d then asked the Angels, "Aren't you embarrassed by this person? Is this not the very person who you visited and ate with in his home? Now you are claiming that human beings shouldn't get the Torah?" The Medrash continues by saying that G-d told Moshe Rabbeinu, "You are only receiving the Torah in the merit of Avraham and this incident of 'Hachnosas Orchim [welcoming guests].'"

If we were not convinced by the first Medrash, this second Medrash is certainly more explicit: Because of the incident of Hosting the Angels, we merit receiving the Torah. What does this mean? Why was this incident so significant?

We see another interesting thing. Something very important happened to the Angels when they came to visit Avraham. The Medrash points out that when the Angels first came, the pasuk states, "They were standing over him" [Bereshis 18:2], they -- so to speak -- towered over him. Later it says, "And he stood over them" [18:8]. Avraham towered over the Angels.

Which is it? Who was towering over whom?

The Medrash reconciles the verses: When the Angels first came in, the Angels dwarfed Avraham. They felt that "We are Angels and he is a mere human being." However, after his acts of hospitality, the tables were turned -- he towered over them. The Medrash says "The Fear of Avraham was placed upon the Angels -- (the Angel) Michael trembled; (the Angel) Gavriel trembled."

What happened that caused the Angels to come in towering and go out trembling?

There is also an additional difficulty: At the beginning of the parsha the verse says, "He lifted his eyes and he saw the Angels standing upon him" [18:2]. The connotation of "He lifted his eyes" is that they were at a great distance. The connotation of "they stood upon him" is that they were right beside him.

Which is it? Were they distant or were they close?

Rav Shlomo Breur answers these questions, by saying that all of these Medrashim tell us what a unique person Avraham Avinu was.

The Torah uses the same language at the Akeidah, the sacrifice of Isaac: "He looked from afar and saw the place at a distance" [22:4]. There is a certain trait about human beings. They see what they want to see and they hear what they want to hear. If we had to sacrifice our only son and the mountain was

at a distance, would we be able to see it from afar? Certainly not. That is a mountain that I don't want to see. It is a situation that I don't want to face. People have the ability to not see what they don't want to see. However, the Medrash is telling us that even though this meant sacrificing his only son, this meant conquering the most basic of human emotions -- the love of a father to a child - nevertheless, Avraham Avinu was able to see the place from a distance. Why? Because he was the type of person that could put G-d's needs before his own. Avraham Avinu was very human, but he was able to control his humanness and use it for the service of G-d. He put G-d's 'needs' before his own needs.

This is the same 'lifting of the eyes' that we have here. Avraham Avinu was 99 years old. He was sick and frail from an operation. How would most human beings act? They are not really in any mood of having guests and certainly will not sit and await their arrival. On the contrary, they will try to avoid, at all costs, coming into contact with any potential guests.

One comes into a shul. There is a poor person sitting there; there is a meshullach sitting there. Don't we all have our way of getting on the 'blinders' and passing by, stiff-necked, less we Chas v'sholom [G-d forbid], make eye-contact with the meshullach!

But Avraham 'lifted his eyes' and even when they were at a distance he had the ability to make his own needs secondary to the needs of the mitzvah and greet the Angels as if they were upon him. Avraham was able to overcome the human frailties, the human desires, the human passions, for the sake of the Ribono shel Olam.

"And G-d appeared to him". This Avraham Avinu -- that had just undergone the mitzvah of milah -- to him the Ribono shel Olam appeared. What is milah? Milah is making a commitment. It marks the place in our body that represents passions, sensuality, and desire and says it is committed. I am committing my drives, my desires, and my passions to G-d. That was the commitment of Parshas Lech Lecha.

Now, at the beginning of Parshas Vayera, the question becomes, "Are you, Avraham Avinu, going to live up to these commitments?" Avraham responds, "Yes, I am."

In Parshas Lech Lecha, Avraham made a theoretical commitment. Now, in Parshas Vayera, this commitment comes into play. Avraham is sick and frail. The inclination is to not want to do the mitzvah. One would, under those circumstances, have no interest in greeting guests. Nevertheless, Avraham Avinu can overcome his humanness. This is the strength of a human being. He can have wants, he can have desires, he can have needs but he can commit them and make them secondary to a higher cause. This is what amazed the Angels. They came in towering over Avraham, a mere mortal. But departed with the recognition that Avraham towers over them. They were trembling in awe of him.

When the time came for the Jews to receive the Torah, and the Angels forgot for a moment and protested the Granting of the Torah to mere mortals, G-d made Moshe Rabbeinu look like Avraham to reminded the Angels: "You forgot the way you felt when you came to Avraham, when you departed in awe of him; you forgot the awesome potential of 'mere mortals' who can take their desires and can make them secondary to the 'needs' of the Ribono shel Olam." Upon hearing that, the Angels ceased to complain.

This is what the Medrash means that in the merit of these three runnings that Avraham ran, the Jewish people merited to receive the Torah. These runnings showed what human beings are capable of. Namely, the aspiring to greatness which transcends their personal wants and needs. The Angels recognized that if human beings can, in fact, accomplish this, they are, indeed, worthy of a Torah.

The Best Education for Children: Do As I Do

The Gemara says in Bava Metziah [86b], that everything that Avraham prepared for the Angels by himself, G-d prepared for Klal Yisroel in the Wilderness by Himself and everything that Avraham prepared for the Angels through an agent (shaliach), G-d prepared for Klal Yisroel through an agent.

I once heard a comment from Rav Chatzkel Sarna: It says in the pasuk that Avraham asked Yishmael to help out in the preparations for the Angels. According to the principle of the above-mentioned Gemara, this was an inferior way of doing the mitzvah. Rather than doing it himself, he delegated it to an agent -- Yishmael.

Rav Chatzkel Sarna asks, how can this be a complaint against Avraham? Why did he delegate the mitzvah to Yishmael? He wanted to educate him in the practice of extending hospitality to guests! How can we find basis for criticizing such a motive? Avraham wasn't being lazy by delegating the tasks to Yishmael. Avraham wanted to educate Yishmael. This is explicit in the Medrash.

Rav Sarna answers with a basic principle: The best way to educate your children -- is to do it yourself! This is even better than to instruct them that they should do acts of kindness. Theoretical teaching is far surpassed by setting an example of what to do.

A Jew once came into the Chofetz Chaim and complained that his son was not learning. He said he could not understand why his son was not learning.

"He certainly sees in me the importance of learning. I appreciate Rabbis, I give honor to Talmidei Chachomim, I give to Yeshivas, I support Torah.

Why doesn't my son have a desire to learn?"

The Chofetz Chaim asked, "Do you learn?"

The man explained, "You know how it is, I'm busy..."

The Chofetz Chaim said, "You're going to raise a fine child. He's going to appreciate Rabbis, he's going to give honor to Talmidei Chachomim, he's going to support Torah and Yeshivas. Why? Because that's what you taught him. You want to teach him to learn? You have to learn!"

The best education is to do it yourself. If one learns himself -- that is the best education for his children - that they should learn. If you do acts of chesed by yourself, that's the best education for your children - that they should do acts of chesed.

Chinuch can't be done on a theoretical basis. The best chinuch is to do it by yourself!

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* TORAH WEEKLY Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion Parshas Vayera

Overview - Three days after performing Bris Mila on himself, Avraham Avinu is visited by Hashem. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will give birth to a son next year. Hashem reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. Hashem agrees that if there are fifty righteous men in Sodom, He will not destroy it. Avraham manages to 'bargain' Hashem down to ten righteous men. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and Amora. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that, as a result of the destruction, there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk, and through him perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar, where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. At Hashem's command, on the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and her son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but Hashem tells him to listen

to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel, and Hashem promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that Hashem is with him. In a tenth and final test, Hashem instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood, and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, Hashem sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of his unquestioning obedience, Hashem now promises Avraham that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Parsha ends with genealogy and the birth of Rivka.

Insights

Where Angels Tread "And he saw and behold three men were standing over him." (18:2) The three 'men' who stood over Avraham were incorporeal spiritual messengers (angels). Rashi tells us that one angel was to tell Sarah that she would conceive and give birth within the year; one was to overturn Sodom and destroy it; and one was to heal Avraham after the bris mila.

Why couldn't one angel have done all this? Is this all too much work for the average angel? Rashi tells us the reason is because an angel cannot perform two functions. However, in the very next line, Rashi also tells us that after healing Avraham, the angel Raphael went on to rescue Lot from Sodom! If one angel cannot perform two functions, why wasn't a second angel dispatched to rescue Lot? To answer this puzzle let us understand why it was that Lot was rescued from Sodom in the first place:

The Lineage of King David Lot's most important descendent was King David, but David's very worthiness to be king was called into question because he was descended from Ruth the Moavite.

The Moavites were descendants of Lot. They knew that the Jewish People were descended from Avraham. And yet, at the time of the Exodus from Egypt they failed to greet the Jewish People with bread and water. This behavior was symptomatic of their chronic ingratitude, and thus the Moavites were forbidden to marry into the Jewish People.

However, it was subsequently clarified that only male Moavites were forbidden to marry in. The women were permitted to enter the ranks of Israel. The reason being that "All the honor of the daughter of the king is inwardness" -- i.e., only men are expected to go out to greet strangers; however, a woman -- a daughter of the King -- is not expected to rush out and greet passers-by. Thus, Ruth and her offspring -- King David -- were deemed free of the defect of ingratitude, and thus David could subsequently become King of Israel.

In the Heavens above, and on the earth beneath The celestial court follows the earthly court. What happens in this world determines the halacha in the higher worlds.

At the time that the three angels were sent to Avraham, a crucial dialogue, a dialogue which was to affect the entire history of the Jewish People, had not yet taken place: When the angels came to Avraham they said "Where is Sarah, your wife?" To which Avraham replied "Behold -- in the tent!" Rashi comments on why Sarah was in the tent -- "She was private and modest."

Only at the moment when Avraham said "Behold -- in the tent!" was it halachically established that a woman is not expected to go out to greet strangers.

Now we can understand why only three angels were sent: At the time when the angels were dispatched, it was not yet clear whether Lot would have the merit to be saved from Sodom. For Lot's merit was that he was the progenitor of Ruth and David. However, David was validated only by the principle that a woman isn't obliged to go out to greet strangers. Thus only when Avraham answered "Behold -- in the tent!" was the halacha clarified that the female Moavites were permitted to marry into the Jewish People, and thus it became necessary for an angel to save Lot, the progenitor of King David. (Chidushei HaRim in Mayana shel Torah)

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Bad Company "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar (Yishmael)...playing." (21:9)

Kid's play. Innocent rough and tumble. The nursery is the cradle of the developing personality. Lessons learned over "Lego" are for life. Avraham saw that Yitzchak's future character was in danger merely by playing with his brother Yishmael. And although Avraham was the pillar of kindness, when he recognized the threat to his son, he banished Yishmael and Hagar to the desert with no more than some bread and water. It may be "only a game," but playing with bad company is like playing with fire. (Based on Reb Michael Treblow)

Haftorah: Melachim II 3:1-37 - Rights and Duties It was not so long ago that the Torah was the only system in which a creditor has absolutely no rights over the physical person of a debtor. The spirit of the Torah insures a poor debtor against the unfeeling or inconsiderate use of a lien on the debtor's chattel. And even where the protection of the creditor stops, the obligation on the debtor to love his fellow Jew -- the debtor -- begins. For we are all the children of Avraham and Sarah. Such is the tzedaka of Avraham in contrast to the Sodomite insistence on the very last penny which can be wrung out through litigation.

Inspiration - The Breath Of Life Just as in the Parsha the angels promise Sarah that she will conceive and give birth to a child, similarly in the Haftorah the prophet Elisha promises a barren Shunamite woman that she will give birth.

The child (later to become the Prophet Yona) dies in his youth, and is resurrected by Elisha who revives him by placing himself on the lifeless child, implanting his own soul into the boy.

This is a lesson for all teachers: One has to 'inspire' -- to breathe one's own life into his pupils and to give over of one's own soul. Nothing less than this will do.

Women of Kindness Just as Avraham and Sarah were both old and yet Hashem gave them a child, similarly in this week's Haftorah, Hashem grants the Shunamite woman and her husband a child.

Why then does the Haftorah begin with an entirely different miracle, that of the miraculous oil filling pitcher after pitcher until the penniless widow of the prophet Ovadia became rich? What is the connection between these three women?

The answer is that they all excelled in chesed (kindness) to others. To this day Sarah is a role-model for the Jewish woman. Her life was an unceasing labor of welcoming guests and teaching them about Hashem. Ovadia's widow was also a heroine of chesed as depicted in the Haftorah, and the same was true of the Shunamite woman. All three cast the mold, the archetype of the Jewish woman for all generations. (Adapted from R' Shimshon Rafael Hirsch & The Midrash Says)

Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations. Yom Zeh Mechubad - "This is the most precious of days..." Six days shall you do your work ... For He created all in six days Shayshes yamim ta'ase m'lachtecha...cichol asa shayshes yamiim

In the Torah passage upon which this phrase is based (Shmos 35:2) the expression is: "Six days shall your work be done."

The significance of this phrasing is understood in the light of what our Sages say (Mesechta Berachos 35): "When Jews do the will of Hashem their work is done for them by others." Hashem does not require our efforts. If we are deserving, He will see that our work is done for us. The reminder is that He needed no help from us in the creation that took place in the first six days of history. He will likewise see to it that when we do His will, all our needs will be taken care of without our efforts.

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"parasha-qa@jerl.co.il" - Vayera

In-Depth Questions on the Parsha and Rashi's commentary. Parshas

Vayera

Parsha Questions

1. Why did Hashem appear to Avraham after the Bris Mila? 2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent? 3. What were the missions of the three angels? 4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet? 5. Why did Avraham ask Yishmael to prepare the food for the guests? 6. The angels asked Avraham where Sarah was. Why? 7. When Hashem related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why? 8. What "cry" from Sodom came before Hashem? 9. How many angels went to Sodom? 10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom? 11. Lot served the angels matzos. Why? 12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom? 13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom? 14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way? 15. In what merit did Hashem save Lot? 16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom? 17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham? 18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah? 19. Why did Hashem listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar? 20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the Akeidah (binding)? ...

Recommended Reading List

Ramban 18:7 The Love of Kindness 18:13 For the Sake of Peace 18:15 Sarah's Laughter 19:8 Lot's Disgrace 22:1 The Meaning of a Trial 22:16 The Promise of Eternity
Sforno 18:2 The Love of Kindness 18:22 Persistence 19:8 Lot's Reasoning 19:11 The Nature of the Wicked 19:37-8 Meaning Well

Answers to this Week's Questions All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so Hashem came to 'visit' him. 2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests. 3. 18:2 - To announce to Sarah that she would give birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom. 4. 18:4 - He thought they were Arabians who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home. 5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of mitzvos. 6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband. 7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace. 8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was put to death because she gave food to a poor man. 9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot. 10. 19:1 - He was a judge. 11. 19:3 - It was Passover. 12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property. 13. 19:17 - Since they too really should have been punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom. 14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt. 15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife. 16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests. 17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him. 18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy. 19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf. 20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

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Peninim on the Torah Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Vayera

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

The sin of Sodom is viewed as the standard of evil. The people exemplify iniquity in its most depraved form. The manner in which the Sodomite acted represents a character trait which Chazal term as middas Sodom; it has its own unique element of evil. Let us focus on their sin and attempt to come to terms with the question, "What was so terrible about the sins of Sodom that has rendered its citizens the eternal symbols of corruption?"

The Navi Yechezkel says, regarding the sin of Sodom (Yechezkel 16:49), "Behold this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters

had pride, surfeit of bread and abundance of idleness, and yet she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." They did not give charity to the poor and needy. Remarkable! Undoubtedly, refraining from contributing to charity, turning one's head and heart away from the plight of the unfortunate is reprehensible, but is this the ultimate sin? The people of Sodom were infamous for travesties much more serious than a lack of compassion. Yet, the Navi does not indicate that those misdeeds warranted eternal castigation; it was their lack of human sensitivity, their emphatic refusal to help others. Is refusing to sustain another Jew reason for such condemnation?

Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl, posits that in reality what might be viewed by us as a human failing is much more - it is tantamount to murder! While we may define stealing as taking that which is not ours, it may lead to much more than that. When one witnesses someone literally starving, we might say that although he is not a charitable or fine person, this lack of sensitivity does not affect the person's integrity or decency.

This idea is valid only when the act of charity falls into the category of voluntary contribution, when lives are not at stake. If an individual is literally starving before our eyes, if his financial situation has declined to the point that he has no food, the one who stands by idly disregarding the pleas of his destitute brother is nothing less than a murderer! Are we the ones to determine our neighbor's financial circumstances? Are we the ones who will pass judgment upon his life? Can we continue to ignore the poor when we take into consideration the possible result of our disregard? In Sodom, lives were at stake. People had nothing to eat. Yet, those who were able to help ignored their fellow man. They were punished accordingly.
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The Berkowitz and Leibtag Families wish Mazal Tov to Kalman and Binny upon their Bar Mitzva, Kalman celebrating Shabbat Parashat Lekh Lekha and Binny Parashat Vayera. The entire VBM Staff wishes Mazal Tov to Michael and Aliza Grynberg on the birth of their daughter, Yael Tova. Michael provides technical support for our lists at Virtual Jerusalem. This shiur is dedicated in memory of the first yearzeit of our father and grandfather Ralph Raskas. - Stanley & Sheri Raskas, Michael & Karen Raskas, Yankie & Aliza Major, Tani & Tamar Benovitz, Ari Raskas, and Jonah Raskas. This week's shiur is donated on the first yearzeit of Ralph Raskas (Reuven ben Chaim Shabti Leib) by his grandchild Rachel Hellman.

PARASHAT VAYERA

by Rav Ezra Bick

The story of Avraham and the angels is so full of incidental lessons - the mitzva of visiting the sick (God visiting Avraham, Rashi 18:1), the mitzva of welcoming strangers (Avraham running about to feed the "men," cf. Shabbat 127a), the permissibility to tell a "white lie" (God changing the account of what Sara said about Avraham's age, Rashi 18:13), the modesty of Sara (Rashi 18:9) - that we are wont to ignore the perplexing nature of the story itself. For what purpose did the angels come to visit Avraham? The obvious answer is to inform him of the impending birth of Yitzchak. But this merely forces us to go one step deeper with our question.

1. Why is it important to inform Avraham that Sara will give birth in one year? God has promised him that he will have children since the beginning of Lekh Lekha. Neither Rivka nor Rachel, who were both barren, received prior notice of their impending pregnancy. Somewhat more generally, what is the importance to us, the readers, of the fact that there was a year's advance notice?

2. More specifically, just a day or two earlier God had already told Avraham the same thing. When commanding Avram to perform mila, God changed his name to Avraham and Sarai's to Sara, adding, "I shall bless her and also give you from her a son" (17:16). A few verses later, God tells Avraham explicitly, "But Sara your wife will bear a son for you, and you shall call his name Yitzchak ... and I will establish my covenant with Yitzchak, who Sara will bear for you AT THIS TIME IN THE NEXT YEAR" (17:19-21). This is nearly identical to the message of the angels. (The Ramban surmises that Avraham had not told Sara this piece of news, perhaps because he

immediately performed mila, and then was ill. Hence the purpose of the angels' visit was to inform Sara of what Avraham already knew. Aside from the inherent unlikelihood of Avraham "forgetting" to tell his wife that after thirty years she is about to bear a son, I think the Torah itself indicates that this is not so. God changed Sarai's name to Sara. From that point on, she is only called Sara, including by the angels when they ask about her. It seems clear that Avraham had already told her of her new name; how could he not have told her of the birth of Yitzchak, which is bound up with the new name?)

3. Finally, why angels? As we pointed out, God Himself had told Avraham the same news. What's more, God has appeared to Avraham at the time the angels come to his tent. It surely appears very strange that God has sent angels to tell Avraham (or Sara) the good news when He Himself is in the midst of speaking to him. No sooner do the angels leave, then God continues His conversation with Avraham. In general, I think we are justified in not expecting someone like Avraham, to whom God spoke often, to have to rely on angels for the message of God. In the Torah, other than Avraham, we find angels speaking only to people who have not merited a more direct communication from God, such as Hagar, Lot, or Bil'am. (This does not include prophetic dreams, such as Yaakov in Beit-El). I think we feel that it is indicative of Hagar's relatively lower status that she is visited by an angel rather than by God. This is true generally in Tanakh as well. Prophets are spoken to by God, while others have extraordinary experiences of meeting an angel. Avraham twice is spoken to by angels - here, and later at the climax of the akeida.

4. This brings us to an additional question which we have perhaps avoided in the past. Just how are we supposed to understand the role of angels, here and elsewhere? The angels speak in God's name (according to most commentators, the phrase "shov ashuv" - "I will return to you in a year" [18:10] is fulfilled when "God remembered Sara as He said, and God did unto Sara as He spoke" [21:1]). They are basically manifestations of God's will - how, then, are we to understand the difference between God speaking to Avraham at the end of Lekh Lekha, and an angel speaking to him at the beginning of Vayera?

I think the answer to these questions, as well as the key to understanding parashat Vayera in general, is rooted in the last section of Lekh Lekha. Brit Mila, the physical induction of Avraham into a covenant with God, introduced by the words, "Walk before Me and be perfect," constituted a transformation of the basic relationship of Avraham to the natural world. In Lekh Lekha, Avraham reacts to the surrounding world according to the rules of nature and society, even as he is aided by God. He fights a battle with his private army. God helps him by granting him victory, but nevertheless he has to fight, using his own powers. Avraham lives on Earth, even as, when he has a problem, God speaks to him from the heaven. But after brit mila, Avraham is no longer merely a saintly inhabitant of Earth, a relatively better member of human society. Now, he walks with God. This is clearly indicated by the opening verse of the parasha. The Abrabanel perceptively deduces from the absence of Avraham's name in the opening verse - "God appeared to him in Elonei Mamre," rather than "God appeared to Avraham in Elonei Mamre" - that this appearance is an immediate continuation of the mila, despite the new parasha (compare the Ramban at the end of 18:2). But there seems to be no purpose for this appearance, no message from God to Avraham. The answer is that in this case, the appearance is its own purpose. After the mila, God visits Avraham to spend time with him, in fellowship, for Avraham now belongs to the society of God and not that of men. Every previous appearance of God to Avraham was to tell him something specific. Here it symbolizes the fellowship of God and Avraham. Mila has changed Avraham's status from that of a righteous individual to that of "yedig Hashem," a part of the spiritual community. He is "ba'al brit" Hashem rather than "ba'al brit" Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre.

Now we come to the visit of the angels. Chazal say that when they meet Avraham they are called "men," whereas when meeting Lot they are referred to as "angels," because Avraham was used to angels, so they appeared to him as men, whereas for Lot it was a novelty. Generalizing somewhat, I think this

means that the presence of angels in Avraham's company, from this point on, is the presence of his fellows, his natural environment. "Walk before me and be perfect." Walking before God, as the retinue of the king, is what we imagine angels do. Avraham lives midst the angels now, so angels appear to him as men.

What is the difference between the announcement by God of Yitzchak's birth in Lekh Lekha and that of the angel here? Notice the introduction - "I shall return to you in one year (ka'et chaya) and behold, a son, of Sara your wife." The angel doesn't merely predict the birth, he states that his presence will be with Avraham and it will be manifested in the presence of a son. In other words, the presence of angels, of God, of a heavenly environment in Avraham's house expresses itself naturally in creation and rejuvenation. Not "I will give you a son," but "behold, a son." Sara ("a greater degree of perception is granted to woman") picks up on this immediately. "After I am worn, shall I experience rejuvenation?" (see Rashi). In Avraham's case, it will be very unusual to have a child at such an advanced age, but for Sara, it requires transcendence of time, a return to her youth. Avraham has a child "in his old age" (21:2 and 21:7), but Sara has actually become young again. Not having directly experienced mila, though included in its results (her name is changed too), Sara laughs in amazement at the thought. The usual flow of time has become meaningless in Avraham's house. The angels do not come merely to INFORM, they come to PRODUCE the effect itself (just as they destroy Sodom, and, according to Chazal, they cure Avraham). In other words, the presence of angels here symbolizes the spirit of God and its workings, not as a miracle from afar to correct a difficult situation, but rather as a total transformation of the conditions of Avraham's life in this world.

All of parashat Vayera reflects this new transcendent state of Avraham. 1. As the angels leave Avraham, God states, "Shall I conceal from Avraham that which I am going to do?" Avraham has become a partner of God's in running the world, a companion, one who shares in the responsibility. "Avraham will become a great and mighty nation and in him, ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED." Can God act in Sodom without telling Avraham? 2. Avraham argues with God about God's role in the world - "The judge of all the earth, shall He not do justice?" Avraham is no longer merely an inhabitant of the lower world, but one who is engaged in defining how it should be run from above. 3. Why was Sodom destroyed? The Torah does not elaborate what was so unusually terrible about Sodom, other than a hint that they did not appreciate guests. Surely, there were other cities around the world that were not particularly hospitable that did not suffer this incredible plight. I think the answer is rooted in Avraham's new state - hence the same angels who visit Avraham destroy Sodom. (Rashi deduces from the singular tense used whenever one of the angels fulfills a mission that each act was performed by a different angel - one to cure Avraham, one to destroy Sodom, and one to announce the birth of Yitzchak. This does not contradict my point that the narrative connects Avraham's receiving the announcement of Yitzchak's birth and the destruction of Sodom precisely by sending the angels to do both. On the contrary. If, for reasons of metaphysical angelology, each angel does one specific and distinct task, why do they travel together? Why do the angels who destroy Sodom and save Lot visit Avraham in the company of the one who has the job of informing him of Yitzchak's birth? Clearly, they are on one long continuous mission.) Sodom is destroyed because Eretz Yisrael does not suffer evil. Compare:

"The last generation, your children who will come after you, and the stranger who will come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land (of Israel) and its sickness, which God has laid upon it. Brimstone, and salt, and burning all the land, not sown, nor growing, nor producing any grass, like the overthrow of Sodom and Amora, Adma and Tzvoim, which God overthrew in his rage and anger. And all the nations shall ask, why... And God rooted them out of their land." (Devarim 29:21-27)

The destruction of the people is not emphasized as much as the destruction of the land. Why is Sodom destroyed by angels who are coming from visiting Avraham after his mila? This, too, is a reflection of the

elevation of Avraham above the natural order. Eretz Yisrael, the land given to Avraham, is no longer a normal land, obeying the natural laws of nature. It is the earthly home of the companions of God, a land which itself cannot suffer wickedness. The same angels (i.e. the presence of God) who, by their presence in Avraham's house, rejuvenate Sara and Avraham via Yitzchak, bring down brimstone and fire by their presence in Sodom. 4. "When God destroyed the cities of the plain, He remembered Avraham, and He sent Lot out of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelled" (19:29). In Lekh Lekha, Avraham saves Lot by attacking the kings who have taken him captive. In Vayeira, he saves him once again simply because God, remembering his companion Avraham, separates Lot from his environment, a pale reflection of Avraham's separation from his environment. 5. Avimelech takes Sara to his palace, as Pharaoh had done earlier. In the first case, a plague (which we of course know comes from God) afflicts Pharaoh, and he hurries to return Sara. This time, God Himself comes to tell Avimelech to return Sara. The midrash and the commentators can barely restrain their astonishment that Avimelech merits the word of God. I think the focus should not be the merit of Avimelech, but rather on the relationship of Avraham and God. Someone has caused Avraham a very serious and personal problem. God intervenes personally to set it right. God adds - "Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live" (20:7). In relation to the inhabitants of the land, Avraham has almost magical powers to intercede with God and cure the sick. God is telling Avimelech, "You have a problem, but Avraham has 'proteksia' with Me; he is one of My own, so he can help you." 6. The akeida - well, that is already another stage, but we are running out of time, so I'll leave that for you to work out on your own.

Vayera is a new parasha because it is a totally new stage in the life of Avraham. It is rooted narratively, however, in the end of Lekh Lekha. The brit of Avram concludes the story of a righteous man; the visit of the angels to Avraham commences the story of heavenly man, what Chazal call "merkava li-Shekhina."

Further questions and points to ponder:

1. On one other occasion, at the end of the akeida, an angel appears to Avraham. Although Chazal claim that angels appear as "men" to Avraham, there he is called an "angel." Why? Notice that the angel there speaks to Avraham "from the heavens."
2. Rashi 23:23 - "Vayihyay chaye Sara."
3. Connect to the shiur. 23:4 - "ger ve-toshav anochi imachem." 23:6 - "nesi elokim ata betocheinu". "All the nations got together and cut cedars and made a great platform. They seated Avraham on it on high and were praising him, saying, 'Nesi elokim ata betocheinu,' you are our king, you are our nasi, you are our god" (Bereishit Rabba 43:5). What is Avraham's social position in Canaan? 4. "From my flesh I behold God" - Had I not done so (performed mila), from where would God have appeared to me?" (Bereishit Raba 48:2. cf. ibid 48:3-5).
5. "Avraham said, Until I did mila, passersby would come in to me; now that I have done mila, are the passersby not going to come to me anymore? God said to him, Until you did mila, humans would come to you, now I Myself (bi-chevodi, in My glory) will come and appear to you, as it is written, Vayeira eilav HaShem" (Bereishit Raba 47:9).
6. The Netziv explains that the difference between God's announcement in Lekh Lekha and the angel's announcement in Vayeira is that God said "at this time in the other year (bashana ha-acheret)," which does not necessarily imply the very next year; the angel said "at this time next year (ka'eit chaya)." How else can we explain the difference between the two phrases? *****

Yeshivat Har Etzion's Eighth Annual Shabbaton with our Rosh HaYeshiva HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN at the Riverdale Jewish Center November 22-23, 1996 For more info, contact our NY office 212-732-GUSH (4874) Copyright (c) 1996 Yeshivat Har Etzion. All rights reserved.

"Avraham, Avraham!"

Summarized by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig

The story of the Akeda (the Binding of Isaac) opens with God's call: "And He said to him, 'Avraham'; and he said, 'Here I am!'" It ends with a double call: "And an angel of God called to him from the heavens, and said, 'Avraham, Avraham!' and he said, 'Here I am!'"

Whenever a person is chosen for a divine mission there is a danger that he will lose some degree of his personal identity and autonomy. The moment his mission begins he sees himself no longer as an independent personality but rather as a representative of society, one out of many, one component of a great community.

King David said (Tehillim 18:51), "[God] performs kindness to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever." And Rav Charlap comments that David had reached such an elevated spiritual level and was so imbued with a sense of mission that he was no longer conscious of himself at all, and was able to speak of himself in the third person - referring to "David" as an expression for anointed leadership. Hence his phrase, "performing kindness to His anointed, to David...."

However, this perception is not shared by God. When God appoints His emissary to perform the Akeda, He calls him - "Avraham!" It is as if God is commanding him, "Come back to yourself! Do not be satisfied with your status as merely a representative of society in general."

The person who is called upon to fulfill the divine mission is usually preoccupied mainly - if not completely - with the performance of that mission. In the process he forgets himself, loses his personal feelings, and sets aside his natural, personal emotions - even the love of a father for his only son.

God is not satisfied with this state of affairs. He calls to Avraham and commands him, "Go forth!" - Return to yourself, to your natural emotions, to your feelings, to your family. From within all of this - and only from within it - you are commanded to "take your son, your only son...."

Avraham sets off to perform the mission which he has been given. He is going to bind and sacrifice not only Yitzchak, but also his own emotions. He acts in a conscious manner; not out of confusion or ecstasy but rather as the culmination of three days of thoughtfulness and planning. Only the angel stops him, preventing him from fulfilling his task, calling to him with a great shout: "Avraham, Avraham!" This double call comes to remind Avraham once more that he is not required to cancel his emotions, his fatherly feelings. He is called to return to being "Avraham," and within the framework of this "Avraham" to strive to achieve spiritual elevation. (Originally delivered at Seuda Shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Vayera 5732. Translated by Kaeren Fish.)

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"halacha@jer1.co.il" Parshas Vayera
 HALACHA FOR 5757 COPYRIGHT 1996-7
 SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS VAYERA
 By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav. ***

Tefilla B'tzibur: How Important?

The Mitzvah of Davening with a Minyan (a religious quorum; ten males over Bar-Mitzvah), though rabbinic in nature, has a Biblical source: When Abraham implored G-d to save Sodom in the merit of the Tzaddikim who dwelled there, he ceased pleading when he realized that there were fewer than ten righteous individuals. This, says the Ibn Ezra(1), is because the fewest number of people that can constitute a Tzibbur - the basic unit for prayer - is ten. It follows that Tefillah, the daily prayer service, should be conducted within a Tzibbur so its manifold benefits will be realized. Indeed, the Rambam(2) and Shulchan Aruch(3) rule that all men should make every effort to Daven all Tefillos with a Minyan, for Tefillah B'tzibur is much more than a preferred course of action - it is a rabbinic obligation(4).

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 PARASHAT VAYERA SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Despite the paramount importance of Tefillah B'tzibbur, however, there are several cases when it becomes a secondary consideration as other Halachos or situations take precedence. For example:

It is forbidden to eat before Davening. A weak person who must eat before Davening should Daven at home early in the morning, eat, and then go to Shul to answer to Kaddish and Kedusha, etc.(5).

If Tefillah B'tzibur would cause a monetary loss, one may Daven B'yechidus (alone). But if it merely causes one to earn less profit, he is not allowed to skip Tefillah B'tzibur(6). A deduction from a paycheck due to lateness caused by Tefillah B'tzibur is considered a monetary loss(7).

It is forbidden for a scholar to learn till late at night if it will cause him to miss Tefillah B'tzibur the next morning(8).

Even if one can concentrate better at home, he is still required to Daven with a Minyan as long as he can concentrate sufficiently to understand the simple translation of the words he is saying(9).

Wearing Tefillin during Shema and Shmone Esrei takes precedence over Tefilla B'tzibur(10).

One who is particular to Daven K'vasikin on a steady basis may Daven B'yechidus when he cannot find a Minyan(11). Even if he does not Daven K'vasikin daily, but is particular to Daven K'vasikin at specific times, e.g., on Erev Rosh Chodesh, he may Daven K'vasikin B'yechidus on those specific days(12).

Krias Hatorah takes precedence over Tefillah B'tzibur(13) and Tefillah K'vasikin(14).

One who must leave for work at a certain time and is faced with a choice whether to Daven in a slow Minyan (such as a Yeshiva or Kollel) and leave before the end of Davening, or to Daven in a quicker Minyan where it is difficult for him to Daven properly, should rather Daven in the slower Minyan - even if it means that he will miss Krias Hatorah on Mondays and Thursdays(15).

QUESTION: How far must one travel from his home in order to Daven Tefillah B'tzibbur?

DISCUSSION: If the closest Minyan is an eighteen minute walk [each way] from one's home, he is exempt from Davening B'tzibbur(16). If he owns a car and uses it for his daily needs, he must travel by car for up to eighteen minutes [each way](17). If he uses his car only for emergencies, then he is not obligated to use his car for Tefilla B'tzibur, either(18).

QUESTION: How many people should be finished with Shmone Esrei before the Chazan may begin repeating the Shmone Esrei?

DISCUSSION: The Poskim debate this issue. Some hold that the Chazan may not repeat the Shmone Esrei until there are nine other people listening to him. Those who are still Davening Shmone Esrei are not included(19). Other Poskim are more lenient. They allow the Chazan to begin the repetition as long as there are six people listening to him(20).

Mishnah Berurah does not directly rule on this issue. On a related matter, he quotes both views and suggests that in a situation when the Chazan realizes that there will not be nine people answering to his Brachos, he should make a condition (Tnai) before starting that his Shmone Esrei should be considered a Tefillas Nedava, a voluntary prayer, should nine people not answer Amen to his Brachos(21).

L'hatchilla, therefore, since some Poskim rule strictly on this issue, the Chazan should wait for nine people to finish their Shmone Esrei. If, however, people are rushing to go to work, etc., we may rely(22) on the more lenient view and begin Shmone Esrei before all nine people have finished(23). The Chazan should do so with the aforementioned precondition.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Bereishis 18:28. See also Targum Yonosan 18:24 for a similar idea.

2 Tefillah 8:1.

3 OC 90:9.

4 Igros Moshe OC 2:27. See, however, Tefilla B'tzibur (pg. 34) quoting the Eimek Bracha's view that the Rambam holds that Tefilla B'tzibur is not an absolute obligation.

5 Biur Halacha 89:3.

6 Mishna Berura 90:29.

7 Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah pg. 49).

8 Igros Moshe OC 2:27.

9 Igros Moshe OC 3:7.

10 Mishnah Berurah 66:40.

11 Biur Halacha 58:1. According to the understanding of Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefilla pg. 43) even one who does not Daven regulary K'vasikin, but would like on a certain day to Daven K'vasikin for the sake of Davening K'vasikin, may Daven without a Minyan..

12 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Tefilla B'tzibur pg. 116).

13 Shu"t Minchas Yitzchok 7:6; Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav S.Y.

Elyashiv (quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefilla pg. 79).

14 Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Tefillah K'hilchasa pg. 73).

15 Written responsum from Harav S.Z. Auerbach (printed in Ha'tefillah

B'tzibur pg. 250) who adds that he should make sure that the other congregants - who see him leaving early - are aware of the reason for his early exit.. Harav Auerbach adds, that even if he is the tenth man who makes up the Minyan, and his early exit will break up the Minyan, he should still do so.

16 Mishnah Berurah 90:52; Igros Moshe OC 2:27.

17 Based on Biur Halacha 163:1; Aruch Hashulchan YD 376:17.

18 Rulings of Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Avnei Yashfe pg. 50 and in Tefillah Khilchasa pg. 138).

19 Shulchan Aruch Harav 55:7; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 20:2; Kaf Hachayim 55:48. This ruling is based on the view of the Taz 55:4.

20 Aruch Hashulchan 55:13; Shu"t Imrei Yoshor 2:9-1; Eimek Bracha Tefilla 6. This ruling is based on the view of Magen Avraham 55:8. This also seems to be the view of the Pri Megadim (MZ 55:4) and Biur Halacha 55:6 - see Tzitz Eliezer 12:9 for an explanation.

21 Mishnah Berura 124:19.

22 See Shalmas Chaim 1:24; Tzitz Eliezer 12:9; Bais Boruch 29:1; Yalkut Yosef 1: 287.

23 According to the Chayei Adam 29:1 and Eimek Bracha Tefilla 6, this should not be relied upon unless there are at least eight people who finished Shmone Esrei.

HALACHA is published L'zchus Hayeled Doniel Meir ben Hinda.

"rsiegel@torah.org" "haftorah@torah.org" Haftorah Parshas Vayeira MESSAGE FROM THE HAFTORAH PARSHAS VAYEIRA M'lochim 2 4:1 This week's Haftorah reveals to us an incredible dimension of faith and its far-reaching effect. The prophet Elisha, in an unsolicited gesture of appreciation for a Shunamite lady's hospitality promised that she would bear a son. This prediction raised significant concern from the Shunamite due to the elderly state of her husband as well as herself, complicated by her medical impossibility of bearing children (see Malbim 4, 14). In response to the prophet's words, she expressed a sincere request that the child live a normal healthy life. The prophet's promise was fulfilled and she gave birth to a baby boy on the exact date predicted. When the boy became a young lad, tragedy struck and he suddenly became deathly ill, and died soon after in his mother's arms. The Shunamite lady did not despair and she immediately travelled to the prophet Elisha. Upon arrival she calmly reminded the prophet of his promise, whereupon Elisha rushed to the scene of her dead child. Elisha prayed to Hashem, warmed the boy's body and Hashem miraculously returned the child to life.

It is most astounding to follow the behavior of this Shunamite lady in the shadow of her own son's death. Upon discovering the tragic turn of events, the Scriptures state, "She arose and laid the (dead) child on the prophet's bed, closed the door and left." There is no mention here of any emotional outburst, cry of despair, or even pains of her enormous tragedy. The Scriptures continue to relate that she calmly requested a donkey from her husband and informed him that she wished to make a peaceful journey to the prophet. Even upon arrival at the prophet's doorstep she maintained that everything at home was in order. Only after entering his private quarters did

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Torah Insights for Shabbat Parashat VaYera 5757

This week's parshah contains the episode of akeidas Yitzchak, the seeming martyrdom of Yitzchak in fulfillment of God's command to his father, Avraham.

Even though martyrdom and the history of the Jewish people are inextricably linked, actual martyrdom is not the preferred goal of Jewish life. Rather, the Torah bids Jews, "vechai bahem," to live by the precepts of Torah and to attempt to avoid having to die because of them.

Thus, the Talmud and Jewish law prescribe the actual circumstances where voluntary martyrdom (an oxymoron, if there ever was one) is permitted.

Maimonides, in his famous code of Jewish law, Mishneh Torah, states that one has no right to give up one's life, even for what one feels to be valid and moral reasons, if the circumstances of the situation are not in exact conformance with the halachic norms established in the Talmud.

Dying for the sake of the Torah and the God of Israel is considered a kiddush hashem, a sanctification of God's name. However, living for the sake of Torah and the God of Israel is an even greater kiddush hashem.

Nevertheless, throughout the centuries, millions of Jews have died for being Jews. This ocean composed of the blood and tears of Jewish martyrs reached flood tide in our century.

A history professor of mine once characterized Jewish history to me as "martyrdom and books" but that is a distorted and dangerous oversimplification. Even in the midst of martyrdom, the rabbis of Israel laid stress upon life and not death, upon surviving and prospering and not succumbing and disappearing.

In the parshah of the week, we see this emphasis on life. After the akeidah, Avraham and Yitzchak renew their efforts at spiritual attainment and positive influence in their society. Instead of being paralyzed and traumatized by the akeidah, Avraham and Yitzchak view their Divine deliverance from actual martyrdom as a call to greater efforts on their part to increase life and to improve its spiritual and moral quality.

Avraham and Yitzchak are prepared for martyrdom if that is God's demand, but they see their future accomplishments in perpetuating family, society, righteousness and holiness through living. As such, they are the archetypical "martyrs" of Jewish existence.

The Talmud relates to us that when the great sage of Israel, Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, was executed by the Romans for the crime of teaching Torah. He was wrapped in a sefer Torah and set ablaze, yet he proclaimed, "The parchment burns but the letters float undamaged in the air." Parchment burns, bodies decay, empires fall, civilizations wither, but the "letters"--the sanctity of life and human values, of Godly precepts and holy traditions--are indestructible.

Jewish history is not only martyrdom and books. It is life and energy, creativity and holiness, service to God and man, Torah and tradition. It is that sort of life and history that makes the akeidah so memorable and relevant to Jews of all times and circumstances.

Certainly our generation, raised in the shadow of the most fearsome akeidah in Jewish history, should rededicate itself to the strengthening of Jewish family, community, Torah and life. The God of Avraham and Yitzchak will not allow us lesser goals.

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B"H The Chassidic Dimension Adaptation of Likutei Sichos by Rabbi Sholom Ber Wineberg

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion

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Vayeira

Vision and Revelation

The Torah portion Vayeira, the Hebrew word for revelation, begins by stating

that "G-d revealed Himself to him [Avraham] in the Plains of Mamrei...."

The Zohar notes that, prior to Avraham's circumcision, he could only encounter G-d in a "bamachazeh" -- the Aramaic word for vision. After his circumcision, he attained such a lofty state that G-d clearly revealed Himself to him -- vayeira.

Clearly, it was the act of circumcision that brought about this radical change in Avraham, so that he became able to see G-d Himself.

What was it about circumcision that brought about this transformation?

The difference in the spiritual quality of Avraham before and after his circumcision will be understood by considering the explanation provided by Chassidus regarding the difference between Hebrew and other languages, which is likened to the difference between stones and bricks.

The basic difference between these two materials lies in the fact that stones are a heavenly creation while bricks are created by man. The same difference exists in languages, and in the letters and words from whence language is "built."

The Hebrew letters, the letters of the Torah, are heavenly -- likened to stones, for the Torah itself is of Divine origin. However, the letters and words of other languages are compared to bricks, for all other languages are entirely artificial -- people got together and agreed that particular words would convey certain meanings.

The difference in Avraham before and after his circumcision will be understood accordingly.

Until G-d commanded Avraham to perform the mitzvah of circumcision, all of Avraham's service was entirely self-motivated, without command -- and thus empowerment -- from Above. As such, his service was necessarily limited, for a created being can only reach so high.

Once G-d commanded Avraham to circumcise himself, he was empowered from Above with the ability to unite with the Almighty through the performance of a boundless G-dly commandment, thereby enabling him to reach infinitely higher.

Moreover, performing the mitzvah of circumcision also had the effect of wholly nullifying Avraham and uniting him with G-d, for the commandment of circumcision possesses a quality possessed by no other mitzvah -- it is performed upon the person's body itself, so that the physical body is aware of its nullification and unification with G-d.

Thus, the level of Avraham's service prior to the mitzvah of circumcision was similar to "bricks;" it was man-made, and thus necessarily limited. Only after he acted in response to the commandment to circumcise himself did his level of service rise to that of "stones" -- accomplished through and empowered by the limitless force of the Divine.

This is also why Avraham's level prior to circumcision was only that of "bamachazeh," for it was similar to man-made bricks. With circumcision, however, Avraham attained Vayeira, the Hebrew word for revelation, similar to "stones" that derive from heaven.

Before Avraham was circumcised, i.e., before he reached total unity with G-dliness, he was only able to view G-d through the veil of a vision, while afterwards, he was able to view a clear and lucid revelation of Essence.

As "the deeds of our forefathers serve as a lesson to their descendants," there is a lesson here for us all:

Just as Avraham failed to reach the highest levels until he performed the mitzvah of circumcision, so too are we to know that we must never be satisfied with our current level of spiritual service, but must always attempt to reach higher; even when one apprehends G-dliness, it may be merely on the level of a "vision."

On the other hand, we are assured that when a person serves as best he can with his own power, he will ultimately receive the most lofty degrees of revelation -- up to and including the supreme revelation of vayeira.

Based on Likutei Sichos, Vol. X, pp. 50-54

Performing Mitzvos -- The Natural Approach

The Torah portion of Vayeira opens with the words: "G-d revealed Himself to Avraham."

The Gemara comments that this took place on the third day following

Avraham's circumcision; on that day, G-d visited him to inquire after his welfare. How does the Gemara deduce that this took place on the third day and not earlier?

The ability of the Jewish people to perform Torah and mitzvos subsequent to Mattan Torah, the Giving of the Torah, derives from the performance of the commandments by the nation's forbears, for "the deeds of the Patriarchs are a sign unto their progeny." However, the mitzvos performed by the Patriarchs were mainly spiritual in nature, and did not have a great effect on the objects involved. In contrast, the mitzvos performed after Mattan Torah permeate physical objects with holiness.

In order that there be a relationship between the mitzvos fulfilled by the Patriarchs and those performed by their descendants, it was necessary that at least one mitzvah be fulfilled by the Patriarchs in exactly the manner that would later be employed by their descendants. This was the mitzvah of circumcision.

One of the main aspects of the mitzvos subsequent to Mattan Torah is their performance in as natural a manner as possible, without recourse to miracles and the like. This is because mitzvos are meant to refine the world by causing sanctity to enter it, rather than miraculously negating its physicality.

This requirement to perform a mitzvah in the most natural manner possible also applies to the preparations necessary for its performance, as well as to its effects.

Understandably, when a mitzvah, the preparation or the results thereof, involve natural difficulties, one should not use supernatural means in order to remove these difficulties. Of course, one should not seek out discomfort and hindrances, but if these are a natural part of a mitzvah or its aftermath, they should not be circumvented by supernatural means.

Since Avraham's circumcision was entirely similar to the mitzvah performed after Mattan Torah, it follows that no miraculous intervention should have been involved in the Patriarch's natural healing process.

Accordingly, we must understand how it was that the angel Raphael -- the angel of healing -- came to Avraham in order to heal him. Why would G-d send a special messenger to alleviate our Patriarch's natural discomfort?

The Rambam explains that the term "angels" also applies to natural forces. The reason for this is that all things below have a spiritual source above. Since the forces of nature descend from angels, they are sometimes called angels -- after their source.

It therefore follows that every natural healing derives from the angel Raphael, albeit after a tremendous descent from the spiritual to the physical, until the angel's action is vested within the physical garments of nature and manifests itself in the specific recovery of a particular individual.

Most people are only capable of seeing the specific healing vested within nature. Avraham, however, was able to perceive the spiritual source of his healing -- "he beheld three 'people,' " one of them being the angel Raphael. Avraham's recovery was thus entirely natural; he merely observed the healing at its source.

Therefore, we must say that Raphael came to heal Avraham only on the third day following Avraham's circumcision, when healing takes place naturally; coming any earlier would have interfered with the natural process. Since Raphael came to Avraham on the same day that G-d appeared to him, it follows that G-d's appearance was also on the third day.

Based on Likkutei Sichos, Vol. V, pp. 77-83