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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON VAYEIRA - 5763

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Based on Drasha by
RABBI ELI BARUCH SHULMAN
Young Israel of Midwood
http://www.yimidwood.org/
[From last year] Parshas Vayera 5762
Haftorah Vayeira

Let us review the events of the haftoroh:
The Ishah Hashunamis extends her hospitality to Elisha, and builds for him an attic. In reward, he promises her: "At Chovekes Ben" "you will give birth to a son."
The son goes out to his father in the field, has a sudden attack, and dies.
The woman comes to Elisha. Elisha gives his staff - his Mishenes - to Geichazi to put on the child. But the woman insists that Elisha come himself.
Geichazi puts his staff on the child, to no avail.
Elisha arrives and brings the child to life.
The Zohar identifies the child as the Navi Chavakuk; the name Chavakuk is a doubling of "At Chovekes Ben", because he was born twice. Is there any significance to this identification; is there anything in the story that relates to the message of the Navi Chavakuk?
Questions: Why did Elisha think that his Mishenes (stick) would be effective; why did the woman insist that he come himself; why wasn't the Mishenes effective.
The Meshech Chachmah states that Elisha thought that he would revive the child in the zechus (merit) of the support the woman had given him; through the Mishenes, which means support.
But the woman felt that her Zechus would not be enough. The child could be revived only in the merit of her emunah in Elisha himself, and therefore only Elisha could perform the miracle.
And so it was.
If we take this line of thought which the Meshech Chachmah has begun for us further, we can understand the significance of the Zohar's identification of this child as Chavakuk:
The Gemara in Makos 23 says, Rav Simlai expounded, 613 mitzvos were said to Moshe, David came and established them (He'emidan) on 13, Yeshayahu came and established them on 6, Micha came and established them on 3, Chavakuk came and established them on 1 - Vitzadik Be'emunaso Yichyeh - a righteous person lives with his faith.
The Gemara certainly doesn't mean that the nevi'im abrogated the mitzvos. (Ein Navi Rasha'i Lechadesh Davar.) Certainly we are obligated to perform all of the mitzvos, to the best of our ability.
The Gemara is concerned with a different question, and it is a burning question - now, today, more than ever. Hashem is busy redeeming the world. And that process is painful and fraught with peril. And we need zechuyos to be part of that Geulah.
And the burning question, therefore, is: Are we part of the solution - or part of the problem? With what zechus can we merit rachmei shamayim (compassion from Heaven), with what merit can we - given that our fulfillment of the miztvos is imperfect - be part of the process of Geulah?
Each Navi narrowed the focus; down to Amos who reduced it to to "Asos Mishpat (Din), Ahavta Chesed (Gemilas Chasadim) Vihatznea Leches (Hachnasas Kalah Vi'Halvayas Hames). But even that was not enough. And so Chavakuk came and revealed that Emunah (faith) alone - if it is strong enough, and sincere enough, can carry us through. And that was a lesson that Chavakuk was uniquely qualified to teach. Because he had been born - reborn - through the merit of his mother's Emunah - her pure faith in Elisha and in Hashem whose Navi he was. And so Chavakuk taught Vitzadik Be'emunaso Yichyeh - through Emunah we can merit life.
The world is changing before our eyes. Certainly we need zechuyos, perhaps as never before. And we certainly should look for opportunities to improve in Torah and Chesed. But perhaps most of all what is called for is Emunah - pure faith in Hashem, faith that He alone is master of the house, that nothing - absolutely nothing - can happen, does happen, but by His will. Emunah that we are completely in His hands. We need to live Emunah - practice Emunah, study Emunah, walk and talk and breathe Emunah. Hashem is changing the world and we have to change along with it, or Chas Vishalom be left behind.
We ask Hashem for Siyata Dishmaya to help us absorb this lesson. Let us rise to the level of these tremendous events around us. And let us merit to see the Geulah Sheleimah unfold before our eyes, speedily and soon.

From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org]
"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayeira -
Let Them Eat Leftovers!

"Please take a bit of water, wash your feet, rest under the tree, and I will give you a little bread" [Bereshis 18:4]. We would think that the person who epitomized welcoming guests into his home would speak differently. Rather than promising a bit of water and a little bread and offering them rest under the tree, we would have expected that Avraham would invite them directly into his house, promise them a nice meal, and put them up in the finest accommodations.
Rav Nissan Alpert explains that many times we are hesitant to take guests into our house. Our excuse is that we really cannot do them justice. We cannot serve a meal that is appropriate for them. "We are having leftovers tonight." "We cannot serve tuna fish to the guests!" "We cannot give them the accommodations that they deserve." "I would rather not invite guests at all than invite them and not give them the honor that they deserve."
We learn just the opposite from Avraham Avinu. Proper hospitality (Hachnasas Orchim) is to invite the guests when they "show up". Let them eat Rice Krispies -- a bit of water, a little bread -- but invite them in. The lesson that our patriarch is teaching us regarding Hachnasas Orchim is to always be ready to have guests. People do not need sumptuous meals. They do not need meals akin to the meal of Shlomo in his heyday. People are even happy with tuna fish. They do not need more. They do not want more.
Rabbi Alpert said that his father used to say "One should never PREPARE for company; but one should always BE PREPARED for company." The quintessential host tells us to have the company. Even if we cannot provide them with our "knock-out" recipes, have the company, nevertheless.

Avraham's Prayers For Sodom Did Help - They Helped Avraham Himself

When G-d was about to destroy Sodom, He said "Will I hide from Avraham that which I am about to do?" [18:17]. He then told Avraham about the imminent destruction of Sodom. Avraham prayed...50, 40, 30,... Ultimately G-d decided to destroy Sodom anyway.
This narration is hard to understand. G-d knew that he was going to destroy Sodom. G-d knew up front that Sodom did not possess 50 or 40 or even 10 righteous people. So what was He doing? Was He playing games with Avraham? It seems as if He was dangling a little prize called Sodom in front of Avraham, challenging him to save the city. It seems as if He was teasing Avraham, because there was no way that Avraham could win the prize! Avraham grasped for the prize, as it were, but could never catch it! It appears as if G-d was setting Avraham up for disappointment.

The fact is that it is possible that G-d was actually doing a tremendous service to Avraham. This exercise helped Avraham to become the pillar of Chessed [altruistic kindness] that he would ultimately represent. We fail to realize that when we pray for something or for someone, those prayers have an effect on us regardless of whether those prayers are answered or not. How many times have we come together as individuals or as a community and poured out our prayers for somebody? There are unfortunately times when "it did not work" and the effort was seemingly to no avail. We ask ourselves "What did we do?" We did what we could. We fasted. We cried. We gave charity. But it did not help!

This is a tremendous mistake. It did help. Even if it did not help anyone else, at least it helped us! We became better people because we were concerned about somebody else -- a neighbor, a friend, a member of the community. We prayed and we gave our hearts. We did something. We became better.

This is what G-d was telling Avraham. "Pray! I will not destroy Sodom until you pray. Why? I know your prayers will not be effective. I know Sodom is doomed. But that is irrelevant. You, Avraham, will become a different person as a result of those prayers. You will perfect your attribute of Chessed, your attribute of caring and compassion. That is what it is all about."

This is so important when we pray for something or someone. We should never think that the prayers are for naught. We do not know what the prayers accomplished -- even for the person for whom we are praying. Maybe, somehow, they lightened the load. We can only speculate about that. But there is one thing regarding which we can be certain -- we became different people as a result of those prayers.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 347, Women and the Laws of Tznius.

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Wednesday, October 23, 2002 6:20 AM To: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il Subject: SICHOT63 -04: Parashat Vayera Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Student Summaries Of Sichot Delivered By The Roshei Yeshiva Parashat Vayera

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Lessons of the Akeida

Adapted by Dov Karoll

...And Avraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And an angel of G-d called to him from heaven, and said, "Avraham, Avraham," and he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Lay not your hand upon the lad, nor do anything to him; for now I know that you fear G-d, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." And Avraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, behind him was a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Avraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in place of his son... (Bereishit 22:10-13) The Torah's description of the akeida, the binding of Yitzchak, emphasizes Avraham's obedience and acceptance, both of G-d's original command as well as its subsequent cancellation. Chazal (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 23) speak of Avraham challenging the angel who comes to cancel the command, and then asking why G-d needed to test him, for He knows what is in Avraham's heart. At that moment G-d opened the heavens and took an oath: By Myself I have sworn that because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son; I will exceedingly bless you, and I will exceedingly multiply your descendants like the stars of the heaven, and the sand on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gates of their enemies, and through them shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice. (Bereishit 22:16-18) According to the midrash, Avraham responded, "You took an oath, so will I: I swear that I will not leave this altar until I say everything I need to." G-d told him to speak. Avraham asked, "Did You not say to me, 'Look to the heavens and count their number… so shall be your descendants?'" (Bereishit 15:5). G-d responded in the affirmative. Avraham asked further, "From whom am I to have these countless descendants?" G-d responded, "From Yitzchak." Avraham answered, "Just as I wanted to respond [with the argument cited above] when You told me 'Bring [Yitzchak] to Me as an offering' (22:2), yet I conquered my inclination and did not do so, so too when Yitzchak's children sin and come upon hard times, You shall remember the akeida of Yitzchak, and You will consider it as if his ash were gathered on the altar, and You will forgive them and redeem them from their difficulty." G-d responded: "You have said yours, and I will say Mine. Yitzchak's descendants will sin before Me, and I will judge them on Rosh Hashana. But if you want to find a zekhut (merit) for them so that I will remember akeidat Yitzchak, they should blow from this shofar before Me." Inquired Avraham, "What shofar?" G-d answered: "Turn around." Immediately, "Avraham raised up his eyes and saw a ram caught by its horns in the thicket, and he took the ram, and offered it in place of his son" (verse 13). The midrash here portrays Avraham as arguing with G-d, just as he did earlier in his pleading with G-d on behalf of Sedom. However, it is important to note that in this case, he argues only after the fact; at the time of the divine demand, he obeyed unquestioningly. The verses themselves do not highlight the midrashic theme of Avraham's arguing with G-d, but rather his unquestioning obedience. Avraham named the place of the akeida "Hashem yireh." Onkelos translates this as, "This will be the place of worship," and he understands the continuation of the verse to mean, "and it will be said that Avraham worshipped G-d on this mountain." Why is the selection of the Temple connected with this event? The Rambam in his Moreh Nevukhim, based on this translation of Onkelos, speaks of the fact that the site of the Mikdash (Temple) was known to many, including Moshe Rabbeinu, going back to the akeida. Why is the Mikdash selected to be specifically on the site of the akeida? When G-d tells Avraham not to offer Yitzchak - "Lay not your hand upon the lad" - He is making it clear to Avraham and to the world that He is not interested in human sacrifice. He is interested in man serving Him through living in this world and not through self- destruction. The verse in Parashat Re'eh (Devarim 12:31) refers to sacrifice of children as "an abomination, hated by G-d." Rav Yosef Albo, in his Sefer Haikaraim (3:14 s.v. aval) explains that one should not think that the problem with idolatry is only whom they are worshipping, but also how they worship. Based on the verse cited above, he explains that the method of idolatrous worship is despised by G-d; the verse comes to point the direction of our Divine service away from human sacrifice, for that is abominable to Him. Rav Albo ends that passage by citing a midrash that the offering of Yitzchak never crossed G-d's mind, so to speak. After the akeida, this message of serving G-d through living in accordance with His will, rather than killing oneself for it, became part of Avraham's mission to the world. The Rambam (Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim 2:3) speaks of Avraham spreading the notion of the worship of G-d among the peoples of the area. Clearly, the negation of human sacrifice was an integral part of his message. We must remember not only the beginning of the story of the akeida, which displayed Avraham's obedience to G-d, but also its end, where G-d showed that He rejects the notion of human sacrifice. Most unfortunately, the notion of human sacrifice, and particularly self-sacrifice, has become very popular in recent times. We have been victims of countless suicide bombers here in Israel, and America suffered from this phenomenon on September 11. The nations who fight against us are not only interested in territory - that cannot explain their zeal. They are fighting a war of ideology, a war against our G-d and His Torah.

The Rambam offers several reasons why the Torah does not disclose the future site of the Mikdash, even though its location was known to Moshe and others. One of his answers is very pertinent to our

situation today. If the other nations had known where the Mikdash was supposed to be built, they would have done whatever they could to assure that we would not be able to get it. We are acutely aware of this problem today. The Arab world does not care about the Arabs who live here. They have oppressed them and provided them with only the worst conditions. They are not interested in supporting the Arabs who live here, but rather in attacking us, and the values that we represent. Among other things that we need to pray for this Rosh Ha-shana is the following. All signs seem to indicate that there will be a major war in the area involving America and Iraq. We need to pray that, assuming this takes place, the State of Israel will incur a minimum of damage and suffering. We need to pray that the Jewish people will not suffer from this apparently impending chain of events. May G-d inscribe us and all Israel for a ketiva va- chatima tova.

(Originally delivered on the second day of Rosh Ha-shana 5763 [2002].) Yeshivat Har Etzion's Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash is on the world wide web at http://www.vbm-torah.org Shiurim may be dedicated to various occasions - yahrzeits, birthdays, etc. Please e-mail office@etzion.org.il

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From: Kerem B'Yavneh Online [feedback@kby.org]
Parshat Vayeira Yisrael and Yishmael Rosh Hayeshiva RAV MORDECHAI GREENBERG SHLITA (From the book, "Me'Invei Hakerem: Sefer Bereishit")
Translated by Rav Meir Orlian

Yisrael and Yishmael are the only two nations that contain G-d's Name, as it says in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (ch. 29):

Bilaam said: Of the seventy nations that G-d created in His world, he did not place His Name in any one of them, other than Yisrael. Since G-d equated Yishmael's name with that of Yisrael: "Oh! Who will survive in his days," as it says, "Oh! Who will survive when He imposes these!" (Bamidbar 24:23)

Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer states further:

Why is his name called Yishmael? Because G-d will hear the sound of the [Israel's] groan from what Bnei Yishmael are destined to do in the Land in the end of days. Therefore, his name is called Yishmael, as it says, "Yishma E-l ve'yaanem" – "G-d will hear and answer them." (Tehillim 55:20)

Radal (R. David Luria) explains that although the name Yishmael was given because G-d heard the voice of Hagar and the voice of the lad, nevertheless, since the name Yishmael is in the future tense, there must be two meanings, one for the past and one for the future.

Israel's enemies are the four kingdoms: Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome. The question is, where does Yishmael fit in? After all, it is impossible to ignore this tremendous mass! The Ibn Ezra writes in Daniel (7:14), that indeed Yishmael is the fourth kingdom, whereas Greece and Rome are considered as one kingdom.

The Ramban on Parshat Balak rejects this position, and writes that the Ibn Ezra erred in this, "because their fear fell upon him." The Maharal also explains that the criteria of the four kingdoms is not only their hatred of Israel, but also the taking away of sovereignty from Israel. They fight against G-d's Kingdom, which is represented by Israel. On the other hand, Yishmael's very strength is because Avraham pleaded on his behalf, "O that Yishmael may live before You" (Bereishit 17:18), and G-d granted his request, "Regarding Yishmael, I have heard you." (17:20)

Yishmael does not come to rebel against G-d's rule, to add another element to divinity, as Christianity does. They believe in One G-d. Therefore the four kingdoms are compared (in Daniel) to animals, whereas Yishmael, to a person. Yet, a "pereh adam" – "A wild donkey of a man." (Bereishit 16:12)

Rav S.R. Hirsch explains that a wild donkey refuses to accept discipline and yoke, but rather is free: "Like a wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness." (Yirmiya 2:24) Therefore, "His hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him." (Bereishit 16:12)

In Hebrew (unlike English), the noun always precedes the adjective, as in "adam gadol" (great man). Thus in the phrase, "pereh adam," the noun is "pereh" and the adjective is "adam." The Chafetz Chaim already wrote that since the Torah is eternal, Yishmael will always be wild, and he added, "Who knows what this pereh adam is still liable to do to Israel."

This idea is expressed in the names Yishmael and Yisrael. Yisrael indicates, "yishar E-l," that we straighten ourselves in the direction of G-d, to walk in His ways. Yishmael is on account of the fact that G-d heard their voices; they subjugate, as if, G-d for their needs. They think that all of what they do is the Divine will; their wars are Jihad, holy wars, and all of their actions – in the name of Allah.

Not long ago, there was a convention of the Islamic clergy to discuss the question of how to explain the fact that this "infection" of the Jewish state got stuck in the middle of the large Islamic region. Their conclusion was that G-d sent Israel into the midst of the Moslem region in order to make it easier to destroy them, what Hitler was unsuccessful in because of the Jews' great dispersion.

There are those who explain that this attitude is a form of idolatry. They worship, "the dust that is on their feet," believing that wherever they go, G-d is with them.

Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (ch. 29) relates that Sarah saw Yishmael shooting an arrow at Yitzchak in order to kill him, and said, "The son of that slavewoman shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak." (Bereishit 21:10) Why does the issue of the inheritance trouble Sarah so much? The sefer, Minchat Ani (by the author of the Aruch Laner) explains that Sarah that Yishmael did want Yitzchak to inherit together with him, but rather he would inherit everything.

Rav Hutner explains that for this reason Yishmael hates Israel so much, since the children of the concubines received presents from Avraham, whereas Yishmael was chased away. Moreover, all of this was after he thought that he was the only child. Therefore, his disappointment was so great, and he burned with hatred.

Why did Yishmael think that everything was his? The Netziv explains that Sarah was punished by being taken to Avimelech's house because she laughed to herself and said, "my husband is old." (Bereishit 18:12) There is an element of quid quo pro here. When she said, "my husband is old," there was a lack of faith that Avraham was capable of fathering. Her punishment was that the skeptics of the time were given room to say that Yitzchak was actually not the son of Avraham, but rather of Avimelech, and that Sarah became pregnant from him. This was the meaning behind Yishmael's mocking.

"The child grew and was weaned. Avraham made a great feast on the day Yitzchak was weaned. Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, ... mocking." (Bereishit 21:8-9) The Sforno writes: "He was ridiculing the feast, saying that she became pregnant from Avimelech." "Sarah laughed in herself saying, ... and my husband is old." (Bereishit 18:12) Now she saw Yishmael mocking that Yitzchak is not his son.

This is the source of the Yishmaelites contention on our holding of Eretz Yisrael, since if Yitzchak is the son of the Philistine, then Eretz Yisrael belongs to the descendents of Avraham, who are the Yishmaelites.

With this we can understand Chazal's teaching that Yishmael repented. Their source is from the pasuk, "Yitzchak and Yishmael, his sons, buried him" (Bereishit 25:9), that Yishmael allowed Yitzchak to go before him. What is the proof from this that he repented? Since Yishmael had claimed that Yitzchak was not Avraham's son, by allowing him to go first, he acknowledged that Yitzchak is, indeed, a son following his father's coffin.

The Zohar in Parshat Va'era teaches that Yishmael's angel complained that he was rejected and that Yitzchak was chosen and received the inheritance of the Land, even though he, too, is circumcised. G-d answered that this was to distance Yishmael from the ultimate clinging, and He gave them a share in the Holy Land below. Thus, Yishmael is destined to rule the Land so long as it is empty, and they will prevent Bnei Yisrael from returning to their place, until the merit of the circumcision runs out.

Eretz Yisrael is the land of faith and Providence: "G-d's eyes are upon it." (Devarim 11:12) Only believers can dwell in it. So long as it is empty, believers like Yishmael can dwell in it, but when Israel, who are steadfast believers, arrive, their merit expires.

Therefore there is a double obligation to increase our faith in these times, to overcome Yishmael's right to the Land.
Now we are approaching the end: "A dread! Great darkness fell upon him." (Bereishit 15:12) "A dread..." – these allude to the four kingdoms; "upon him" alludes to Yishmael, and over them the son of David will sprout, as it says, "His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon him, his crown will sprout." (Tehillim 132:18) R. Chaim Vital writes that all of the kingdoms wanted to convert us, and only through this came to murder, unlike Yishmael, whose goal is to eradicate Yisrael's name from the world, and does not suffice with converting faith.
The Rambam writes in Iggeret Teiman that there was no nation worse to Israel than Yishmael, and about them David said, "Woe unto me, for I dwelled with Meshech, I dwelled with the tents of Kedar." (Tehillim 120:5) Despite the fact that we bear their yoke without complaining, and their subjugation and their lies and falsehoods are more than we can handle, despite all this, we cannot be saved from the magnitude of their evil and recklessness. As much as we chase after peace with them, they chase us with war, as David said, "I am peace; but when I speak, they are for war." (120:7)
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From: RABBI LIPMAN PODOLSKY [podolsky@hakotel.edu]
Parshas Vayera
Two of a Kind
Rabbinic garb tended to make the Bais HaLevi (HaRav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik, the first in the Brisker Torah-dynasty) a bit uneasy. Thus, when on the road, he often removed his "uniform" and donned plain clothes, so he could travel incognito.
Once, in the deep freeze of a Lithuanian winter, he had to travel from Brisk to Baranovitch by horse and wagon. The cold was unbearable. When he realized that they would not reach their destination before nightfall, he asked his wagon-driver to stop at a lonely Jewish inn on the side of the road.
They knocked on the door, but no one answered. The Bais HaLevi ordered his driver to knock as hard as he could, for they were literally freezing! Finally, the innkeeper, irate for having been roused out of bed, begrudgingly opened the door a crack, attempting to prevent the icy wind from penetrating.
"What do you want?" he barked.
"Please let us in, give us a room," they begged, "We're freezing!"
He arrogantly snapped that he had no space for them because all of his rooms were already reserved for "important guests." They pleaded, they implored, but the innkeeper wouldn't budge. He even tried to slam the door shut in their faces, but the big, burly wagon-driver prevented him from doing so. The Bais HaLevi beseeched him once more to have pity on his fellow Jews; they would even sleep on the floor! After all, to lock them outside in such adverse conditions was tantamount to a death sentence! Finally, at long last, he let them in. But, make no mistake, he did not give them a comfortable bed in a heated room. Rather, he reluctantly granted them a narrow strip of hallway in which to sleep, on the hard, cold floor (no mattress), so as not to inconvenience his "distinguished" guests. In addition, in return for this luxury he demanded the exorbitant sum of one ruble each. They didn't quibble, though; they were glad to be inside, protected from the life-threatening cold.
The driver lay down, while the Bais HaLevi lit a small candle from which to learn Torah. Before he could open his sefer (book), the innkeeper's harsh voice rang loud, "Put out that light at once! How dare you disturb our sleep!"
The Bais HaLevi extinguished the candle and continued to learn by heart, silently.
A short while later, a large band of chassidim arrived headed by their illustrious Rebbe, Reb Aharon of Koidenov. These were the "important guests" the innkeeper had been waiting for. The host and his wife dressed their faces with smiles as they opened the door graciously for their honored company. Hastily, they lit lanterns and kindled a warm fire, sparing no effort to treat their guests in accordance with their stature. The chassidim sat on comfortable couches as the innkeeper selflessly doled out hot cups of tea to thaw them out after their frigid journey.
After they had warmed themselves, Reb Aharon arose to prepare himself for Maariv. As he passed through the hallway to wash his hands, he noticed two Jews lying on the floor. One of them seemed a bit familiar. After scrutinizing his face in the darkness, Reb Aharon realized that there before him, on the floor, lay the venerable Rav of Brisk. He instinctively cried out, "Reb Yoshe Ber, the Brisker Rav! What are you doing lying here on the floor?!"
The chassidim, followed by the innkeeper, hurried to see what had excited their Rebbe. The shock, disbelief, and indignation felt by all were palpable. Slowly, the chassidim turned their accusing gaze upon the now-minuscule innkeeper, a man guilty of unprecedented irreverence.
The innkeeper was mortified. How could he have acted so callously toward one of the leading sages of the generation? Reb Aharon directed the innkeeper to beg the Bais HaLevi's forgiveness.
The innkeeper meekly squeaked, "I am very sorry for how I acted. I didn't realize that you were the Brisker Rav."
The Bais HaLevi bluntly responded, "I don't forgive you."
The innkeeper was stunned.
Reb Aharon ordered the innkeeper to beg forgiveness once again, and yet again he was rebuffed.
In the end, the Bais HaLevi acquiesced. He said, "Of course I will forgive you, but please, first allow me to relate to you the following Dvar Torah.
"In Parshas Vayera we learn of two individuals, each of whom seemingly excelled in the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim (hospitality). Ninety-nine year old Avraham, on the third and most painful day following his circumcision, schlepped himself out of bed and went outside, in the extreme heat, in a desperate search for wayfarers with whom he could perform loving-kindness. When Hashem sent him the three angels, Avraham, thinking they were humans, went out of his way to treat them royally. He ran enthusiastically from place to place, arranging for them a lavish feast. He mobilized his entire household to feed and take care of these three strangers. And while they were dining, he graciously stood over them, catering to their every whim. Understandably, the Torah praises Avraham to no end.
"Later in the parsha, we find Avraham's nephew, Lot, ostensibly displaying the very same characteristics. When he encountered the angels, he pressed them to come to his home to be his guests. He would not take no for an answer. He knew he was risking his life, but the paramount mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim would not be neglected. When they arrived, he prepared a feast comparable to that of Avraham. Later, when the wicked citizens of Sodom demanded that Lot hand his guests over to them, Lot went out alone to defend them, closing the door behind him. He even offered to sacrifice his own daughters to guarantee the safety of his cherished guests. And finally, Lot nearly lost his own life as the depraved mob began to riot.
"Such self-sacrifice for the sake of Chessed must have earned for Lot untold reward. He most certainly must have accrued ample merits in Hashem's eyes. Yet, when Lot was rescued from the inferno of Sodom, we find that Lot was saved only because of Avraham's merits, and not his own (Rashi 19:17). How can this be? What happened to his own reward? Indeed, what differentiated the Hachnasas Orchim of Avraham from that of Lot?"
Answered the Bais HaLevi: "When the angels appeared to Avraham, they appeared in the guise of wandering Arabs (Rashi 18:4). Avraham assumed them to be complete strangers, of no special significance. Nevertheless, Avraham sacrificed of himself for their sake, with alacrity and devotion. He spared nothing to provide his anonymous guests with the ultimate in luxury and pleasure.
"Lot, however, realized from the very first moment that his guests were none other than Heavenly angels (Breishis 19:1). It is no special feat to perform Chessed with angels. Even the fact that Lot risked his life dwindles to insignificance, for with angels, he could safely rely on their Divine protection. This is the difference between the Chessed of Avraham, and that of Lot.
"It is no excuse to say that you did not realize that I was the Brisker Rav. It makes no difference who I was, you should have welcomed me honorably, as one should to any fellow Jew. So I will forgive you on the following condition. I want you to come to Brisk to be my guest for two weeks."
The innkeeper thought this condition a little strange, but what could he say? He agreed, and obtained the Bais HaLevi's forgiveness.
Shortly thereafter, the innkeeper made his way to Brisk to fulfill his condition. With his own eyes he witnessed how the Bais HaLevi welcomed and fed the poor of Brisk, how he mercifully alleviated the suffering of the sick and impoverished. He beheld how the Rav himself literally resuscitated those near despair. He saw, and became transformed into a

new man. After he returned home, the innkeeper embarked on a new career of Chessed and loving-kindness. Eventually he became famous as the most hospitable host in his region.
It's relatively easy to do Chessed with famous personalities. When the spotlights of social recognition shine upon us, we find ourselves invigorated with the Yetzer Tov of loving-kindness. But how do we react when we know that our Chessed will remain unrevealed? How do we treat the members of our family, in the privacy of our home?
A big person is measured by his numerous small acts; a small person by his few big ones.

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From: RABBI RISKIN'S SHABBAT SHALOM LIST [parsha@ohrtorahstone.org.il]
Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayera (Genesis 18:1-22:24) By Shlomo Riskin Efrat, Israel - Each year we return to the awesome and aweful story of the binding of Isaac and are struck by the same agonizing questions: How could the Almighty have commanded an act as horrific as a father slaughtering (sacrificing?) his son, and how could Abraham have accepted the command without a resounding argument? After all, this is the same Abraham who argued on behalf of the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah, remonstrating against Divine injustice: Far be it from You (Oh G-d) from doing this thing, to destroy the righteousness with the wicked. Will the judge of the entire earth not execute justice? (Genesis 18:25) And in this instance, in addition to the obvious innocence of Isaac, there is the added argument of the Divine promise: "For through Isaac shall your future progeny (lit. seed) be called. (Genesis 21:12) What is the true meaning of G-d_s command, and how may we best understand the lack of Abraham's protection of Isaac?
Rav Yosef Ibn Kaspi suggests that we not remove the dialogue between G-d and Abraham from the context of the ancient Near East from whence it originated and to which it applied - at least in the first instance. Abraham lived in a world of idolatrous child-offerings, a blood-thirsty god Molech who demanded that fathers demonstrate their fealty to him by placing their children on his fiery altar (tragically this ancient and cruel form of idolatry has returned with a vengeance to the present-day Middle East, with Palestinian parents, teachers and preachers encouraging children not only to blow themselves up in a raining fire of explosives but to take with them to the burning grave-pyre innocent Israeli mothers and babies). Hence Abraham was almost expecting the Divine voice to command, "Take now your son, your only son, the one whom you love, to the land of Moriah, and offer him up as a whole burnt offering" (Genesis 22:2). And given the fanatical religious climate of the Middle East, Abraham's silent acquiescence is to be expected of a person of faith.
From this perspective, the real test comes with G-d's second command, just at the crucial moment when Abraham sent forth his hand and he took the knife to slaughter his son. The deus ex machina arrives as an angel of G-d from heaven, crying out, "Abraham, Abraham, do not send forth your hand to the lad, and do not do him any harm, for now I know that you fear G-d and you did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me." (Genesis 22: 10-12). Ibn Kaspi would argue that the entire point of this Biblical event is to teach against child sacrifice, to show how qualitatively different are the demands of a loving G-d of life and peace form the bloodthirsty cruelty of Molech and his Islamic - fundamentalistic heirs. And for this Biblical commentator, Abraham truly passes this test when he obeys the second command of the angel, with the end of the verse I last cited perhaps to be translated, "for now I know that you fear G-d, and you did not remove (hasokh may well be translated to mean to remove, take away, cause to be absent) your son, your only one, because of Me [my first commandment]" (Genesis 22:12). To a great extent, Rashi seems to be in fundamental agreement with the position of Ibn Kaspi, when he cites the midrash which insists that the Almighty did not say that he (Abraham) should slaughter Isaac, because the Holy One Blessed Be He did not want Abraham to slaughter him, but only to bring him up to the mountain in dedication "and then to take him down" (Rashi on Genesis 22:2). Apparently for Rashi, the ideal Divine will is for Abraham's children to live by G-d's laws in constant commitment, and not to die for them in a momentary act of martyrdom. But if that is truly the case, if Ibn Kaspi is correct, then why does the initial formulation of the Divine command seem so absolute, and, if Rashi is correct, why are the words so ambiguous? After all, G-d does seem to say, "Take now your son" and bring him up there as an olah, generally translated as a whole burnt offering? I believe the answer lies in the fact that when the Torah speaks to the ancient Near East, it also speaks to all subsequent generations -- and the pages of Jewish history are blood-soaked and tear-stained with accounts of parents who had to watch their children go to cruel deaths in times of persecution in order for Judaism and the Jewish nation to survive -- and ultimately prevail. Indeed, even in our generation, we in Israel are witnesses to hundreds of parents who are forced to change the natural order of the world and to bury their children, sacrifices of a cruel war perpetrated by a blood thirsty enemy who is hell-bent on our destruction. The Talmud records just such a harrowing tale concerning a woman whose seven children were murdered by the Roman Caesar because they refused to bow down to an idol. The distraught mother cried out to them, "My children, go and say to Abraham your father, you sacrificed before one altar, whereas I sacrificed before seven altars". Then the mother threw herself off the roof and died. A voice came down from heaven, crying out, "the mother of the children rejoices" (B.T. Gittin 57b). For many parents who are faced with the agony of seeing their children's lives snuffed out in sanctification of G-d's name, their Biblical model of the parent who has passed the test of such a challenge is Abraham, in accordance with the plain meaning of G-d's first command. Indeed, so powerful was this Abrahamic model that there was even an ancient tradition that Abraham actually slaughtered Isaac and G-d brought him back to life. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra makes reference to it in his commentary on the verse, "And Abraham returned to the lads" and Abraham dwelt in Be'er Sheba (Genesis 22:1), where he writes, "Isaac isn't mentioned, because he was still under Abraham's jurisdiction". But the one who says that Abraham slaughtered him and left him and afterwards he returned to life is saying the opposite of what the text teaches. Nevertheless, the Midrash Hagadol states that G-d brought Isaac to Eden for three years - until he came back to earth to marry Rebecca - and the Ashkenaz Slichot for the morning before Rosh Hashana makes reference to the "ashes of Isaac on the altar which constantly evokes Divine mercy" (Mordecai HaMechaber).
The story of the akedah is complex - and teaches many lessons. We learn from it, at one and the same time, not to court martyrdom, that our G-d desires us to live and not to die, but that, if there is no other choice, we must dedicate our lives to eternal commitments which are more important than any individual life.
Shabbat Shalom.
You can find Rabbi Riskin's parshiot on the web at: http://www.ohrtorahstone.org.il/parsha/index.htm
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From: listmaster@shemayisrael.com To: peninim@shemayisrael.com
Subject: PENINIM ON THE TORAH BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM - Parshas Vayera
PARSHAS VAYERA For I give him special attention because he commands his children and his household after him. (18:19) Hashem expresses His affection for Avraham Avinu because of his adherence to imparting the derech Hashem, way of Hashem, to the next generation. It is Avraham's ability and dedication to educating his progeny which distinguishes him from everyone else. Chinuch habanim, educating one's children, is what differentiates a parent from a caretaker. A parent cares about his child and, consequently, oversees his educational development. A caretaker cares primarily about himself, placing his child's education in a far second-place behind everything else. What is the most effective method for educating one's children? Since Avraham is the "father" of education, it would be appropriate to take note of his methods and apply them in raising our children. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, notes that when Avraham conveyed Hashem's command regarding the Akeidah to Yitzchak, he spoke only eight words: "Hineni beni…Elokim yireh lo haseh l'olah beni, "Here I am, my son…Hashem will show the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." This is all that is recorded by the Torah of their dialogue preceding the Akeidah. We derive from here, posits Rav Zilberstein, that a multitude of words -- long, tedious conversations -- are not what is necessary in order to appropriately convey the Torah way to one's children. There is another way, a better way, Avraham Avinu's way -- to be a proper role model: Be straight; be ethical; be moral; be truly observant. Do not communicate mixed messages. Do not say one thing and practice the

opposite. In short, earn your child's respect and set the proper standard for him to emulate. A child can observe no greater chinuch, lesson in education, than watching his father following the path of Torah without compromise.

"Because I said (only) there is no fear of Hashem in this place and they will kill me on account of (to take) my wife." (20:11) Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, had occasion to be in Germany a number of years prior to the Nazi implementation of their Master Plan. At the time, Germany was considered among the most progressive and intellectual nations. Its culture and nobility presented a paradigm for others to emulate. As we know, however, it was all superficial. Something was missing from this cold, dispassionate culture. The Jews were an "accepted" part of society. This, of course, led to assimilation. Little did they know the tragic events, the cataclysmic horrors, that were lurking right around the corner. Rav Elchanan delivered a lecture to the Kollel, post-graduate fellows, of the Seminar L'Rabbanim in Berlin. He began his address by first citing Avraham's response to Avimelech, explaining why he claimed Sarah was his sister, rather than state the truth that she was his wife. Avraham feared for his life, since he was in a country in which the people did not fear G-d. In making his statement, Avraham says rok, "only," there is no fear in this place. Why does he add the word rok, only? This word appears to be superfluous. Rav Elchanan explained that Avraham Avinu was conveying an important principle/message to Avimelech. He told him, "You have an impressive community, cultured, intellectual; everything for which one can ask, rok, only, there is one thing that is clearly missing - yiraas Shomayim - fear of Heaven. This is why I had decided that my wife and I are in mortal danger. If the base passions of any of your countrymen becomes ignited for my wife, I am as good as dead." In such a situation, culture, intellect and breeding have no value. Only one thing can prevent a tragedy: yiraas Shomayim. With these words, Rav Elchonon was alluding to the danger lurking under the surface of the progressive and enlightened German culture. No one believed that such a refined nation could descend to the nadir of depravity, to rewrite the meaning of cruelty. The Germans were missing one thing - one thing that distinguishes between a human being and an animal: yiraas Shomayim.

We derive from here an important lesson. Fear of Heaven is the key to humanness. It is the only way that one can control his base nature. Man needs discipline. This discipline can only come from a source whom man respects and fears. If there is no fear, there is no man. In his "Chaim Shel Torah," Horav Yaakov Beifus, Shlita, analogizes this idea with an example from the world of vegetation. Trees are good for the environment. They provide shade; they enhance the beauty of their surroundings. One can even have fun climbing them. Fruit-bearing trees have an added benefit: they provide fruit, and, thereby, sustenance for us. It goes without saying that the fruit-bearing quality of these trees is not simply just another benefit; it constitutes their essence. Without this quality, they are just plain trees! Likewise, man is comprised of various attributes. The virtue of yiraas Shomayim supercedes every other virtue, because, without it, he is not a human being.

Rav Elchanan supplements his thesis, citing the Zohar HaKadosh which suggests that Hashem wanted man to be comprised of all of the creatures in the world. He should be a veritable microcosm of the creations preceding him. This is why when Hashem was about to create man, He called together all creatures and said, Naase Adam, "Let us make man." He should have a bit of every creature in him. Thus, all the creatures "shared" in the creation of man.

With this in mind, we understand that man is a formidable creature. He is part lion, part leopard, part snake, part vulture, and part insect. He is a conglomerate of every animal, wild beast, fowl, insect, and fish. How do we keep this creation known as "man" in check? What chain do we tie on him to keep him from destroying everything around, if he so pleases? Only one thing: yiraas Shomayim, the chain of fear, the chain of discipline, the chain of respect. What is yiraas Shomayim? Rav Beifus explains that it is the acute awareness that Hashem observes everything that we do. He witnesses every nuance, every movement. He knows every thought. This awareness inspires fear and awe, which in turn, evokes a sense of humility and shame if He sees us doing anything inappropriate. How does one acquire yiraas Shomayim? Simple - constant awareness and reiteration that Hashem is above us watching at all times. Awareness, however, is not sufficient. One must acquire this awareness and integrate it into his psyche.

A well-known incident occurred concerning the Chafetz Chaim, zl, that supports this idea. The Chafetz Chaim was once traveling by wagon. While on the road, the wagon driver noticed a melon in someone's field by the side of the road. He quickly pulled over the wagon and jumped out. He was about to pick it up, when the Chafetz Chaim shouted, "They are watching!" When the driver heard this, he quickly returned to the wagon. Upon noticing again that no one seemed to be around, he made another attempt to retrieve the melon from the person's field. Once again, the Chafetz Chaim shouted, "They are watching!"

This happened a few times, until the wagon driver gave up trying to "appropriate" the melon for himself. As they continued their trip, the driver turned to the Chafetz Chaim and asked, "To what do you attribute the fact that each time I went to take the melon you saw someone watching while I saw no one?"

The Chafetz Chaim's response is something which should catalyze within us a heightened sense of awareness in regard to our daily endeavor. He said, "I also did not see any man. I meant that they are watching in Heaven!"

Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid, "I place Hashem before me constantly," should be the catchword by which we live. Our function is to remain resolute, so that when the yetzer hora, evil inclination, begins with its blandishments, we respond, "They are watching!" This defines yiraas Shomayim. Thus, it is the essence of man.

Avraham prayed to Hashem, and Hashem healed Avimelech, his wife, and his female slaves and they gave birth. (20:17) Hashem punished Avimelech and his families for taking Sarah from Avraham. It is interesting to note Avraham's reaction when Avimelech realized that he had erred. Avraham prayed that Avimelech be cured from his punishment. Avraham Avinu, the amud ha'chesed, pillar of kindness, conveys to us the appropriate response to hearing about someone else's misfortune - pray for him! Avraham's sympathy set the standard for his descendants. How often do we hear about another Jew who has fallen ill or succumbed to another misfortune. While it is true that we feel for him, how many of us feel the pain as if it were our own? Avraham prayed for Avimelech, simply because it was the right thing to do.

Furthermore, Avraham prayed for Avimelech to be able to have children once again, a blessing that had eluded Avraham. He prayed for someone else, even though he himself would have been overjoyed to have children. According to human nature, if one hears about another person who has sustained the same illness from which he himself is suffering, he will not pray for his fellow. He might even feel that misery loves company. Avraham Avinu had every reason to disregard Avimelech's "situation." After all, it was not as if Avraham had himself been blessed with children, that he should now concern himself with Avimelech.

This was not Avraham's manner and this is not the way a Jew should respond. As descendants of Avraham Avinu, when we hear of another Jew's pain our immediate reaction should be to daven for them. Is that not what we do for ourselves? Horav Moshe Leib Sasover,zl, was wont to say, "To know the needs of men and to bear the burdens of their sorrows - that is the true love of man." Avraham Avinu was rewarded for praying for Avimelech. Chazal tell us, "Anyone who prays for his friend, when he himself is in need of that mercy, he is answered first." Whether this is a reward, or Hashem's response to an act of total self-effacement, it is a wonderful eitzah, piece of advice, for those in need. As mentioned before, it goes against the grain of human nature to rejoice in another person's joy when he personally is in need of that same blessing. If one can break away from his natural proclivity and elevate himself to pray for another person in the same need, Hashem will certainly look favorably on his prayer -- and He will bless that individual first.

Visiting the sick is not easy. To walk in, smile, convey best wishes and leave, does not constitute bikur cholim. To fulfill the mitzvah of visiting the sick, one must empathize with him; one must pray for him. To visit the sick means to pray for him. To care for the sick means to pray for them. One who feels for another Jew knows that there is only one "address" for assistance - Hashem - and he turns to Him.

Let me close with a notable Midrash regarding Avraham's prayer on behalf of Avimelech: Chazal portray the Heavenly angels crying out to Hashem, "Ribono Shel Olam! Sarah has been barren for so many years. Avraham prays for Avimelech's wife, and she becomes fertile along with his other midwives. These women You remember, and You listen. Yet, Sarah remains infertile. Is this justice?" Immediately, Hashem remembered Sarah. This Midrash tells it all; we have only to listen.

And they stood up and went together. (22:19) The Torah uses this phrase three times in regard to the Akeidah. The first time, when Avraham left his home together with Yitzchak on the way to the Akeidah, the Torah writes that "they walked together." Rashi explains that "together" means that Avraham, who was acutely aware of his mission to slaughter his only son, went with the same good will and joy as Yitzchak, who knew nothing of Hashem's command. The second time the Torah writes this phrase it is after Avraham had hinted to Yitzchak that he would be the sacrifice. Yet, Yitzchak accepted Hashem's command in such a manner that he continued "walking together" with Avraham, as one person with one sentiment. The third time seems problematic, since it refers to Avraham and Yitzchak returning from the Akeidah together with his two lads, Yishmael and Eliezer. How are we to understand this "togetherness"? Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, explains that Eliezer and Yishmael were unaware of the heightened spiritual experience which they had missed, having no clue to what had transpired. Likewise, Avraham and Yitzchak, who played the leading roles in this drama, left the Akeidah without any feeling of haughtiness after having experienced this seminal event. Probably the best word that comes to mind is: equanimity. They acted as they were supposed to act. In no way did they feel that they deserved any special round of applause or unusual commendation. They did not bask in assumed glory. It was not a deed performed beyond the call of duty. It is for this very purpose that they were created. They were Jews, and a Jew follows Hashem's command - unequivocally, with equanimity, because that is what a Jew is supposed to do. To put it in simple terms: a musician makes music; a physician heals; a teacher instructs; a Jew follows Hashem's command.

Hebrew Academy of Cleveland Rabbi L. Scheinbaum Sponsored in honor of the marriage of our Grandson and Son Daniel to Bryna Weisbart Daughter of Norman and Arlene Weisbart "May we continue to share much nachas from our children and grandchildren" Izsak and Idal Keller Hymie and Marcia Keller

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From: RABBI MENACHEM LEIBTAG [tsc@bezeqint.net] Subject: [par-new]VAYERA - shiur

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [http://www.tanach.org] In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT VAYERA

It is very comfortable to think of Sedom as a city of thugs and perverts. After all, is that not the reason why G-d decided to destroy it? However, if one takes a closer look at the Torah's presentation of these events, one could reach the opposite conclusion - that Sedom was a city with culture that boasted a society not very different from our own. In the following shiur we examine this possibility, as we discuss the contrast between Sedom and Avraham Avinu.

INTRODUCTION Our series on Sefer Bereishit has been following the theme of "bechira", i.e. G-d's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation. In last week's shiur, we discussed the purpose why G-d chose Avraham Avinu - i.e. to create a nation that will bring the Name of G-d and His message to all mankind. But how will this nation ultimately achieve this goal? In this week's shiur, we'd like to show how the answer to this question is found in the story of G-d's consultation with Avraham before He destroys Sedom. To better appreciate how the Torah presents these events; we begin our shiur by paying attention to the lack of "parshiya" divisions in this entire narrative.

AN EXTRA LONG 'PARSHIYA' Using a Tanakh Koren, follow the segment from the beginning of Parshat Vayera (18:1) until the conclusion of the story of Sedom at the end of chapter 19. As you will surely notice, this entire portion constitutes one long 'parshiya' (uninterrupted by paragraph breaks in the Torah), despite the fact that it seems to contain at least two independent topics: * The news that Sarah will give birth to Yitzchak; * The story of G-d's destruction of Sedom (& Lot's rescue).

Nonetheless, the lack of a 'parshiya' break already indicates that these two episodes must share some thematic connection. The most obvious connection is the "mal'akhim" [angels or messengers] who are involved in both stories. For some reason, the same "mal'akhim" who are sent to destroy Sedom are instructed to first inform Avraham about the forthcoming birth of Yitzchak. However, this observation raises precisely the same question: why is it necessary for the same angels who are to destroy Sedom to first stop and inform Avraham of Yitzchak's birth? [If we adopt Rashi's position (see 18:2) that each angel was assigned only one mission, then we would phrase the question this way: why must all three travel together?]] THE DEEPER 'CONNECTION' The truth is - the Torah itself provides the answer to this question - right where we would expect to find it, at the transition point between these two stories. Simply take a look the Torah's 'parenthetical' comment, inserted as Avraham escorts his guests on their way to Sedom. Read these psukim carefully, noting how they explain why G-d must first consult Avraham before destroying Sedom:

"And G-d said: Shall I hide from Avraham what I am about to do? For Avraham is to become a great nation [goy gadol], and through him, all other nations will be blessed [ve- nivrekhu bo...] For I have singled him out in order that he will instruct HIS CHILDREN and his family (household???) after him to keep the way of G-d by doing what is just and right... - in order that I shall bring upon Avraham all that I have spoken about him." (see 18:17-19)

Note how G-d's decision to consult with Avraham before destroying Sedom relates directly to the destiny that he has been charged to pass on to his son - Yitzchak - to follow G-d's way of doing "tzedaka & mishpat". To appreciate the profundity of this statement, review these three psukim once again, noting their textual and thematic parallels to the first three psukim of Parshat Lekh Lekha (see 12:1-3), where G-d explained His original decision to choose Avraham Avinu: "And G-d said to Avraham: Leave your land. -. ve-e'eskha le- goy gadol - and I will make you a great nation - and bless you and you will be a blessing [to others] -"ve-nivrekhu bekha kol mishpechot ha-adama / - and through you all the nations will be blessed" (see 12:13)

The parallel is obvious, and there remain no doubt that the Torah wishes to link these two passages! In other words, for the same reason that G-d had chosen Avraham to become the forefather of His special nation - He now consults with Avraham before destroying Sedom! But let's take a looks once again verses 18 &19, noting how they explain the 'technology' by which G-d's plan will unfold. The 'great nation' that will emerge from Avraham will become a blessing for all mankind - for they will carry a 'family tradition' of teaching and performing acts of TZEDAKA u-MISHPAT! (see 18:18-19) G-d expects Avraham to initiate a family tradition - that will create a society characterized by acts of "tzedaka & mishpat". In this manner, they will truly serve as G-d's model nation. [See also Devarim 4:5-8 for a very similar explanation.]

PREVENTING FUTURE CITIES LIKE SEDOM This 'prelude' explains how both stories in this one "parshiya" are connected. When G-d's master plan for the nation of Avraham will materialize, societies such as Sedom could be saved, for there will be a 'model nation' from whom they can learn. However, at this point in time, Sedom is a 'lost cause' for it lacks a minimal number of "tzadikim" who could possibly influence the rest of the city. This can explain why the Torah records Avraham's petition that G-d spare the doomed city. Avraham does not ask that G-d simply save the "tzadikim" in Sedom; he begs instead that the ENTIRE city be saved - for the sake of those "tzadikim"! [See 18:26.] - Why? Because - hopefully - those "tzadikim" may one day influence the people in Sedom towards proper "teshuva," just as the nation of Avraham is destined to lead all mankind in the direction of G-d. This also explains when Avraham's petition ends. After G-d agrees to save the city for the sake of 50 righteous men, Avraham continues to 'bargain' for the sake of 45, 40, 30, etc. - until he reaches ten (see 18:23-32). He stops at ten, for there is little chance that such a small number would ever be able to exert a serious influence upon an entire community. [This may relate to the concept of a "minyan" - a minimum amount of people capable of making G-d's Name known. Note as well the influence the ten 'spies' have on the entire nation in the incident of the "meraglim", and how Chazal learn the number ten for a "minyan" from that incident!]

It is G-d's hope that, in the future, Avraham's nation would prevent the emergence of 'future Sedoms' - by creating a model society established on acts of "tzedaka u-mishpat". But, as Yitzchak is the son through whom this tradition will be transmitted, it becomes very meaningful that the same angels assigned to destroy Sedom must first 'plant the seeds' for the prevention of future Sedom's. Avraham's petition may constitute a gallant effort to save Sedom, and it reflects the very purpose for which he has been chosen; however, at this time it was futile. Nevertheless, its 'timing' is meaningful for Avraham must pass this message to his son Yitzchak, as their offspring are destined to form a nation that would 'set an example' that can save 'future societies like Sedom'.

Even though at this point in the narrative, we are not yet aware of the precise sin of Sedom, this 'prelude' to G-d's announcement of His decision

to destroy Sedom certainly suggests that their sin must relate in some manner to a lack of "tzedaka u-mishpat". With this in mind, we must now attempt to determine more precisely what their sin was, and how it represents the antithesis of everything for which Avraham stands.

AVRAHAM VS. SEDOM Chapter 18 is not our first encounter with the city of Sedom. Already in chapter 13 of Sefer Breishit, we found how Lot's decision to leave Avraham and move to Sedom (see 13:1-18) reflected his decision to dissociate himself from his uncle, and hence his preference not to be 'dependent' upon G-d (see TSC shiur on Parshat Lekh Lekha). It is in that context that we are told: "The men of Sedom were very wicked to G-d" (see 13:13).

Similarly, in chapter 14, we met the King of Sedom, from whom Avraham refuses to keep any property (recovered in his military victory over the Four Kings). In that encounter, note how Avraham Avinu explains his decision to totally divorce himself from any resources originating from that city: "Avram said to the King of Sedom: I swear to the Lord, G-d Most High, Creator of heaven and earth: I will not take so much as a thread or a shoe strap of what is YOURS, so you can not say: It is I who made Avram rich" (14:22-23).

This backdrop almost forces us to read the ensuing story in chapter 19, in search for a lack of "tzedek u-mishpat" in city of Sedom.

NO GUESTS ALLOWED! We begin by showing how our story opens with a focus on Lot's hospitality ["hachnasat orchim" - certainly a shining example of "tzedek u'mishpat"]. Let's review the first three psukim of chapter 19, noting how the Torah goes out of its way to describe how insistent Lot is to provide the two 'unknown travelers' with a place to stay: "And the two mal'akhim came to Sedom towards evening, and Lot was sitting by the gate of the city, as he saw them he approached them... And he said - Please come stay at your servant's house, for lodging and washing up, then you can continue on your way in the morning; but they declined. But Lot very much insisted, so they came to his house; he gave them to drink and baked for them wafers to eat". (see 19:1-3).

One could suggest (as Ramban does) that this same theme continues in the Torah's description of the city's reaction to Lot's harboring of his two guests: "..They [his two guests] had not lain down yet when the townspeople, the men of Sedom, gathered outside his house - from YOUNG to OLD - ALL the people until the edge [of the city]. And they PROTESTED [outside his house] and shouted: 'WHERE are those men who came to visit you this evening? Take them OUT of your house so we can KNOW them [ve- nei'da'em]" (see 19:4-5).

Most of us are familiar with Rashi's interpretation, that the gathering consisted of merely a small group of the lowest social and ethical stratum of Sedom [i.e. the 'thugs'], who wanted to 'know them' in the Biblical sense (i.e. sodomy, based on 19:8 and 4:1). However, the Torah only states that the demonstrators wanted to 'know them', which is open to a wide range of interpretation. A more simple explanation, as advanced by Rasag & Ramban, would be to explain that the ENTIRE city had joined in the protest demonstration, demanding to know who these guests were. Why are they protesting? As Ramban explains so beautifully (see his commentary on 19:5), the Sedomites are protesting against Lot's "hachnasat orchim" [hospitality to strangers]! If so, then there appears to have been a strict law in Sedom: NO GUESTS ALLOWED! As Ramban explains, the Sedomites didn't want to ruin their exclusive [suburban] neighborhood. Should Lot accommodate guests this evening, tomorrow night more guests may come [like cats] and by the end of the month, the city streets could be flooded with transients and beggars. Should the 'word get out' that there is 'free lodging' in Sedom, their perfect 'country club' would be ruined. [One could even find a warped ideology in this policy. If everyone agreed not to take care of the needy, then (maybe) they would ultimately learn to take care of themselves.] Hence, should any citizen ["chas ve-shalom"] bring home a guest, the city's 'steering committee' would immediately call for a public protest. [See also Sanhedrin 109a.] There may have been "mishpat," in Sedom - a standardized system of laws - but it was terribly warped. Not to mention the fact that "tzedaka" had no place whatsoever in this bastion of amorality. [Chazal remark in Pirkei Avot that the social norm of "sheli sheli, shelkha shelkha" - what is mine is mine, what is yours is yours - is a 'custom of Sedom.' The attribution of this social philosophy to Sedom reflects this same understanding (see Pirkei Avot 5:10 - "arba midot ba- adam...").]

TZEDEK U-MISHPAT VS. SEDOM To support this interpretation, we simply need to take a short tour of "Nevi'im Acharonim", where consistently; Sedom is always associated with a rebuke of the nation in the absence of "tzedek u-mishpat." In fact, the three most famous of the Nevi'im Acharonim - Yeshayahu, Yirmiyahu, and Yechezkel - all of whom foresee and forewarn the destruction of the first Temple, compare the corrupt society in Israel to that of Sedom, and see therein the reason for their own forthcoming destruction. As we will show, in every instance where the prophets mention Sedom, it is always in reference to a society lacking social justice, and never in reference to illicit behavior such as sodomy.

Let's start with a quote from Yechezkel in which he states explicitly that this was indeed the sin of Sedom (i.e. the very same point discussed above concerning "hachnasat orchim"): "...Your younger sister was Sedom... Did you not walk in her ways and practice her abominations? Why, you are more corrupt than they in all your ways... This was the sin of your sister Sedom - she had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility, yet she did not support the POOR and the NEEDY. In her haughtiness, they sinned before Me, so I REMOVED them, as you saw..." (see Yechezkel 16:46-50).

In Yeshayahu, this connection between the lack of "tzedek u-mishpat" and Sedom is even more explicit. As we all recall from the Haftara of Shabbat Chazon, Yeshayahu compares Am Yisrael's behavior to that of Sedom & Amora: "Listen to the word of G-d - you [who are like] officers of SEDOM, pay attention to the teachings of our G-d - you [who are like] the people of AMORA. Why should I accept your many offerings... Instead, learn to do good, devote yourself to justice, aid the wronged, uphold the rights of the orphan, defend the cause of the widow... How has the faithful city, once filled with MISHPAT TZEDEK, now become a city of murderers..." (See Isaiah 1:10-21, see also 1:3-9!)

Recall also how Yeshayahu concludes this nevu'a: "Tzion be-MISHPAT tipadeh, ve-shaveha bI-TZEDAKA - Zion will be redeemed by our doing "MISHPAT"; her repentance - through our performance of "TZEDAKA".

As further proof, recall Yeshayahu's famous "mashal ha- kerem" [the parable of the vineyard] in chapter five, when the prophet reiterates G-d's initial hope and plan that Am Yisrael would perform "tzedaka u-mishpat," and the punishment they deserve for doing exactly the opposite: "va-yikav le-MISHPAT - ve-hiney mispach" - [G-d had hoped to find justice, and found instead injustice], "li-TZEDAKA - ve-hiney tze'aka." to find "tzedaka," and instead found iniquity / (Yeshayahu 5:7) [Note the striking parallel with Breishit 18:19-21!] See also Isaiah 5:1-10, as well as 11:1-6

Perhaps the strongest expression of this theme is found in Yirmiyahu. In his powerful charge to the House of David [whose lineage stems not only from Yehuda but also (& not by chance) from Ruth the Moabite, a descendant of Lot!], Yirmiyahu articulates G-d's precise expectation of the Jewish king: "Hear the word of G-d, King of Judah, you who sit on the throne of David... Do MISHPAT U-TZEDAKA... do not wrong a stranger, an orphan, and the widow.." (Yirmiyahu 22:1-5). [See also 21:11-12.]

Later, when Yirmiyahu contrasts the corrupt king Yehoyakim with his righteous father Yoshiyahu, he admonishes: "... Your father (Yoshiyahu)... performed TZEDAKA U-MISHPAT, and that made him content. He upheld the rights of the poor and needy - is this not what it means to KNOW Me [la-da'at oti], G-d has said! But you (Yehoyakim) - on your mind is only your ill-gotten gains..." (see 22:13-17)

Note that Yirmiyahu considers doing "tzedaka & mishpat" as the means by which we come to 'know G-d' ["la-da'at et Hashem" - (compare with Breishit 18:19, see also Yirmiyahu 9:23)]! Finally, when Yirmiyahu speaks of the ideal king who will ultimately bring the redemption, he emphasizes this very same theme: "A time is coming - Hashem declares - when I will raise up a TRUE branch of David's line. He shall reign as king and prosper, and he will perform MISHPAT and TZEDAKA in the land. In his days, Yehuda shall be delivered and Israel shall dwell secure..." (23:5-6). [See also Zecharya 7:9; 8:8, 16-17, II Shmuel 8:15!]

This reason for the choice of the Kingdom of David corresponds with the underlying purpose behind G-d's choosing of Avraham Avinu. As we have explained numerous times, G-d's designation of Avraham came not in REWARD for his exemplary behavior, but rather FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE: to establish a model nation - characterized by "tzedek u-mishpat" - that will bring all mankind closer to G-d. For this very same reason, G-d chooses a royal family to rule this nation - the House of David. They too are chosen IN ORDER to teach the nation the ways of tzedaka u-mishpat.

But even in times when the people of Israel lack that proper leadership, this charge remains our eternal goal, the responsibility of every individual. To prove this and to summarize this theme, we need only quote one last pasuk from Yirmiyahu (not by chance, the concluding pasuk of the Haftara

for Tisha Be-av): "Thus says the Lord: Let not the CHAKHAM [wise man] glory in his wisdom; Let not the GIBOR [strong man] glory in his strength; Let not the ASHIR [rich man] glory in his riches. - But only in this should one glory: Let him be wise to KNOW Me [haskel v-YADO'A oti] - For I the Lord act in the land with CHESED [kindness], MISHPAT, and TZEDAKA - for it is this that I desire, says the Lord." (see Yirmiyahu 9:22-23). [See also the Rambam's concluding remarks to the last chapter of Moreh Nevukhim!]

Once again we find that 'KNOWING G-d' (in the Biblical sense) means emulating His ways, acting in accordance with the values of TZEDEK u-MISHPAT. Should the entire nation act in this manner, our goal will be accomplished. Thus, what at first appears to be simply a parenthetical statement by G-d (concerning Avraham) before destroying Sedom (in Breishit 18:19) unfolds as a primary theme throughout Tanakh!

LA'-DA'AT - THE KEY WORD It is not by chance that Yirmiyahu (in the above examples) uses the Hebrew word "la-da'at" in the context of following a lifestyle of "tzedek u-mishpat". As we have already seen, the shoresh "daled.ayin.heh" has been a key word throughout the narrative concerning Sedom. First and foremost in a positive context: "ki yeda'tiv lema'an asher... la'assot tzedaka u-mishpat..." (18:19), but also in a negative context: "ve-im lo eida'a" (see 18:21!). However, this same word also surfaces in a rather ambiguous manner later on in the story. As noted briefly earlier, Rashi and Ramban dispute the meaning of "ve-neida otam" (see 19:5 - when the protesters demand that Lot surrender his guests). From this pasuk alone, it is not at all clear what this phrase implies.

Rashi explains that the men of Sedom wanted to 'know them' in the Biblical sense (to 'sleep' with them "mishkav zakhar" - see 4:1 & Chizkuni on 19:5). Ramban contends that they wanted to 'know' their identity in order to 'kick them out of town,' in accordance with their city ordinance prohibiting visitors.

Clearly, Ramban takes into consideration the psukim from Yechezkel (which he cites explicitly, and most probably also took into account Yeshayahu chapter 1) that clearly identify Sedom's [primary] sin as their unwillingness to help the poor and needy. In light of the direct contrast drawn between Avraham's devotion to TZEDEK U-MISHPAT and the character of Sedom (as in 18:17-19), we can readily understand why Ramban sought to interpret "ve-neida otam" as relation to 'kicking out' unwanted guests.

Rashi (and many other commentators) argue that "ve-neida otam" implies "mishkav zakhar" (sodomy - and hence its name!). This opinion is based primarily on Lot's reaction to the protestors' request of offering his two daughters instead of his guests, and his comment, "asher lo YAD'U ish" (see 19:8 / note again the use of the same "shoresh"). Had it not been for the psukim in Yechezkel 16:48-50, and the prelude in Breishit 18:19, then Rashi's explanation seems to be the most logical. However, when we examine the story a little more carefully, the story itself can support Ramban's approach as well. To begin, it is important to point out a major problem with Rashi's explanation that the protestors were interested in sodomy. Recall from 19:4 that the group gathering outside Lot's house included the entire city, and hence most likely hundreds of individuals, young and old! If this group was interested in sodomy, pardon the expression, how could two guests 'suffice'? [Rashi, in light of this problem, offers a somewhat novel explanation for 19:4, that only the "thugs of Sedom" ("anshei Sedom" implying a specific group of 'thugs' and not the entire city) banged on Lot's door. The Torah mentions the rest of the population - "from young to old" - only in regard to the fact that they did not protest the gang's depraved behavior. Rasag (on 19:4) disagrees, proving from 19:11 that both young and old, and hence the entire city, had gathered outside Lot's house.]

What supports Rashi's interpretation is the Lot's ensuing offer of his two daughters to 'appease' the crowd, which clearly suggests that the crowd's interest was more 'sexual' than 'social'. To resolve this problem, Ramban combines both explanations, criticizing Lot's own baffling character for foolishly offering his two daughters to quell the crowd's request to expel his guests (see Ramban on 19:8). However, Ramban's explanation is not less difficult, for how (and why) should Lot's offer of his daughters appease this mass crowd who claim (according to Ramban) to be interested only in expelling unwanted guests!

We will now suggest an explanation for Lot's remarks to the crowd that can resolve all of the above questions, leaving Lot's character untainted (at least at this point), while keeping the focus of this entire incident on the topic of "tzedek u-mishpat". To do so, we must explain Lot's offer of his two daughters in a manner that it will fit into the logical flow of this story, as it has unfolded thus far.

GIVING 'MUSAR' To explain Lot's statement, we posit that he was not seriously offering his two daughters; rather, Lot was making a sarcastic comment - in his attempt to rebuke the crowd. In other words, when Lot pleads:" My brothers, don't do such evil [to my guests], here are my two daughters..." (see 19:6); he is not seriously offering his daughters. [As we explained above, how could two women 'suffice' the crowd any more than two men.] Quite the opposite, Lot's offer constitutes a vehement condemnation of the city's social values. In a sarcastic manner, Lot is telling the crowd that he'd 'sooner give over his daughters' than his guests - to emphasize how important a value it was to him! [Our interpretation assumes that in Sedom it would be unthinkable for a father to offer his daughters in such a manner. Lot is telling them, that according to his own values, not taking care for his guests would be no less despicable than a father offering his daughters to a violent mob. Furthermore, the fact that Lot does not bring his daughters with him when he makes this so-called 'offer' to the crowd, but rather closes the door behind himself (see 19:6). Had Lot really wanted to 'appease' them with his daughters, he should have taken them outside with him!]

Even though this interpretation may appear to be a bit 'stretched', it finds support when we study the crowd's reaction to Lot's offer. Had Lot been seriously offering his daughters instead of his guests, then the crowd should have responded by either accepting his offer of his daughters, or insisting on their original request for his guests. However, a quick glance at the next pasuk proves that the crowd understood Lot's offer as rebuke, and not as a serious offer: "And they said to him: MOVE AWAY [gesh hal'ah - move a far distance], you have just (recently) come to dwell (in our city) and now YOU JUDGE US! Now we will deal with YOU worse than with them..." (see 19:9).

What did Lot say that prompted such a severe reaction? If he simply had offered his daughters, why couldn't they just answer: No, we prefer the men. Instead, they threaten to do more evil with Lot than with his guests. Does this mean that they want to 'sleep' with Lot as well? To the contrary! The crowd is taken aback by his harsh rebuke of their 'no guest' policy, for they do not appreciate being told what's 'right & wrong' in their town from a 'newcomer'. This is precisely why they say: "One has just come to live by us - va-yishpot shafot - and now he is JUDGING US; now we will deal more harshly with YOU than [we planned to deal] with THEM!" (see 19:8).

Now they want to expel both Lot AND his guests out of town. This can also explain what the people mean when they say "you are JUDGING US"? Apparently, there was something very 'judgmental' in Lot's response that irked them; for they understood Lot's sarcastic offer as a moral judgment of their 'no-guest' policy.

refers to. They are angered for Lot has 'judged' their character. No one likes being told what to do, especially by 'newcomers'; hence their angry and threatening reaction to Lot's remarks.

This interpretation of "shafot" [in "va-yishpot shafot"] as rebuke is found many other times in Tanakh. See for example Shmuel Aleph 7:6, where Shmuel (at Mitzpa) rebukes the entire nation for their behavior. We find a similar use of the verb "lishpot" in Shmuel Aleph 12:7, when Shmuel rebukes the nation for not appreciating G-d's salvation when asking for a king to lead them instead! [See also Yirmiyahu 1:16, and its context.]

In conclusion, if our interpretation is correct, then it may be that Sedom's sin involved ONLY social justice (as Yechezkel 16:48-49 implies), and had nothing to do with 'sodomy' at all! And for this reason alone, G-d found it necessary to destroy that city. This would also explain why the later prophets refer to Sedom only in relation to a lack of "tzedek u'mishpat", and never in relation to a sin of sodomy (or anything similar). However, most significant - it highlights the primacy of social justice and "hachnasat orchim" in the ladder of Jewish values; for the Bible presents Sedom as the antithesis of what Am Yisrael should be. Difficult as it may be to accept, this conclusion should be seriously considered as we set our own values and determine our lifestyle and community priorities.

shabbat shalom, menachem

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