

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET  
ON VAYEIRA - 5767

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**Rav Soloveitchik ZT"L Notes ( Volume 3)**

Notice These are unapproved unedited notes [of R.Y.?] of classes given by Rav Soloveitchik. We do not know who wrote the notes. However we offer this to the world that maybe someone can get some use out of these notes. A member of the family has looked at the notes and said that look like the real thing . (Rav Soloveitchik did NOT write these notes.) [Thanks to David Isaac for typing these notes]

**Lecture delivered by Rabbi Soloveitchik on**

Saturday night, November 10, 1979

Parsha Vayera

I shall commence the season by discussing a few p'sukim from sedra Vayera. "Vayera Alov Hashem B'aylonay Mamre" (And G-d appeared to him at the Terebiths of Mamre and he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.) Rashi says that the Alm-ghty came to pay a sick or courtesy call. Rav Chona ben Chanina says that it was the third day after circumcision and the most painful day. The Alm-ghty came to inquire how Abraham felt. How does Rav Chona get this idea? It should have read "Vayera Hashem El Avrohom" instead of using the pronoun Aylov - to him.

What is the difference in using the pronoun instead of the proper name of Abraham? If the phrase read that Hashem came to Abraham it would be a different subject from that which closed out the previous parsha, namely the circumcision of Abraham. It would be speaking of an entirely new entity. Who is the "Aylov" (to him)? We are not told so it obviously means the same person previously mentioned, namely Abraham and the story of the circumcision. The fact that Torah does not use the name Abraham means that you know hwo is spoken about and that is is a continuation or extension.

In the previous parsha, G-d is referred to as Elokim from the beginning of the prophecy concerning the "Milah". Right after the "Milah" the prophecy is in Shem Havayah. Something happens during this circumcision. Sometimes it is Elokim; sometimes Havayah. Thus, the relationship between G-d and Abraham and the revelation is different.

In sedra "Voyehra" of Sh'mos, Rashi asks: "How does the text declare, 'And I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the Alm-ghty G-d but My name Havayah I did not reveal to them,' (In view of the fact that Havayah is used here in today's sedra)?" The answer is that G-d never used to the patriarchs "Anyi Hashem" - this was used only to Moshe. It means, "Trust Me; I am faithful to repay a kindness." To the patriarchs it was not

necessary, "Anyi Hashem". They believed and trusted without proof or assurance.

When the word Elokim is used, it is the relationship of G-d to the entire universe of which man is a part. It is the relationship of g-d to creation in general of which man is a part. This includes the entire cosmos. Havayah, however, emphasizes the unique relationship of G-d to man. The journey of man to G-d is close through Havaya; it is much longer through Elokim. He listens and hears to prayer without traveling an endless journey. During the first six days of creation, we have Elokim. With the appearance of man it is Hashem. Man enjoys a certain privilege of lcoseness! Thus, when Abraham performed the "Milah," he achieved a closer relationship, directly and quickly.

There is something else. When we say Elokim, we are not referring that G-d wants man to follow His footsteps or imitate Him. "Elokim is Bal Hokochos" -- the master of power. The cosmos exists because Elokim is the source of the physical existence. The organic matter follows certain rules. It is all under the term Elokim. Under Elokim, He fashions and causes the universe to function and perpetually exist. We say on Rosh Hashanah, "V'Kayom Lo'ad." It (universe) should exist and function for always. He supports and sustains and causes the universe to exist. This is the creation of Rosh Hashanah.

Havaya is different. It tells man, particularly the Jew, to be like Him. A lot is written about Hewish ethics, morality. What is morality? Whatever G-d does is moral; what He doesn't do is immoral. As Rav Yose said, "I'll be like You." We should travel the same trail as Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Abraham, by the circumcision, suddenly was elevated to a higher level from Elokim to Havaya.

Thus, we find at Sinai: "Onocho Hashem". The implementation of Hashem Havaya came when G-d gave us the Torah. It is the duty of man to imitate. It had its beginning in part, not completely, when Abraham performed the circumcision. This is why Chazal combined Lech L'cha to Vayera -- the transition of Elokim to Havaya. This implements the thought that when G-d appears to man, He wants to teach him M'vaker Cholim (visiting sick), Rav Chessed (Mercy), V'Emes (and truth). He nurses the sick, comforts the mourners, clothes the naked, feeds the hungry. G-d says to Abraham: "You are greater now than you ewre before. I want to teach you to imitate me all I do -- Bikur Cholim -- visiting the sick. Hashem Havaya is the source of all morality. Thus, by using "Aylov" the entire emphasis is on Hashem; otherwise the emphasis would be on Abraham.

When G-d reveals Himself as Havaya and teaches man Bikur Cholim, what does it consist of? Basically, it is a threefold teaching: A) It is nursing man. Rabbi Akivah personally nursed a student hwo was dangerously ill back to health when all others dreaded approaching. In Tehilim, we declare, "G-d shall support and sustain me." B) Visit the 'choleh' to pray for him. There is no comparison to seeing a man in pain and praying for him than making an anonymous Mi-Sh'Bayrach. My tefilah will be warmer. How can this apply to G-d? Rabbi Yehoshuah Kohan Godol said: "I entered the Kodshe Kedoshim - Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur and saw a vision of "Rom V'nisay' (G-d on a lofty throne). In the vision, G-d declared: "I need someone to pray that the Midas Rachamin - the attribute of mercy should overcome the Midas Hadin - the attribute of justice). C) Man who is sick becomes extremely lonely. Only the sick can expereince the solitude that no one cares for him. The message is: "You are needed! We need you!" This is what G-d demonstrated to Abraham and wanted Abraham to be like He is. For this, he needed the revelation of Havaya on the day when the pain was the greatest. G-d left him a "small book of morality." The book was sealed with the four letters of Havaya.

Posek II: B'Aylona Mamre. Apparently, Chazal didn't understand why it was necessary to designate the place. Rashi quotes the medrash that Mamre was the one who advised Abraham how to comply with the request of G-d. It is a strange medrash but what forced them to say so? It is indicative of something great; this individual apparently did something great. Mamre was a farmer in whose land Hashem appeared. The only answer is that he was

responsible for Abraham being circumcised. There was some reluctance on the part of Abraham, a problem which troubled his mind. In chapter 17 of sedra Lech L'cha, line 1 it reads: "And Abram was 99 years old when the L-rd appeared to him and said 'Ani Kal Shaddai - I am the Alm-ghty etc.'" And Abram fell on his face. Later in line 17 "He fell on his face and rejoiced."

The question is, when G-d told Abraham to leave his land, it was a short sentence. There was no waiting, no dialogue. Abraham up and went. Again at the Akedah, there was no questioning; Abraham took Isaac and went. Here, apparently, Abraham questions and engages G-d in a dialogue. The greatness for which Abraham is famous is his great unquestioning faith. So why did he engage G-d in dialogue here? Medrash tells us that apparently Abraham asked questions not recorded in the Torah.

Abraham's concern was: Before I was circumcised, people came to me, joined me, did business with me and spoke with me. If I circumcise will they continue to come? All communication lines with people, with those loyal to me will be terminated and I'll be lonely." Medrash declares that G-d answered: "Abraham, are you worried? You won't lose me! It is enough that I will be your defender. It is not only enough for you but for the world that I am the "dayan" judge of the world. The word "Dai" (from Shadai) is - cut off - limiting the expansion which would have continued. Before people come; now they stop as evidence that he set up a chair outside his tent to see if strangers would pass by.

Abraham was not reluctant but he wanted to understand and Jewish history later verified it. Abraham was under the impression that G-d wanted him to convert the entire mankind. He thought his mission is a universal one. What is the meaning of a "Hey" in his name from Abram to Abraham? It means the father of a multitude! In his wanderings, what was the idea of his entering from the north, the Golan Heights, going to the arid south and onto Egypt? It means if Mitzraim will accept monotheism the mission will be complete for the center of mankind was Mitzraim. If you convince the center of humanity, paganism will be eradicated. The same is true with Christianity for it conquered Rome, the center of humanity. Abraham misunderstood. He reasoned that it will happen at once in his lifetime and that the multitudes will accept. In fact, many thousands did accept. He wandered from place to place, from kingdom to kingdom. "El Haaretz Asher Arekah" - to the land which I will show you. The same is true with the Akedah. Maimonides says, "You will go from place to place and you will teach."

However, this was not the plan of G-d. The plan was to develop a little nation that knows Hashem at least for the time being. The quantity plays no part. "You are the smallest of nations. However, you are "Am Segulah" - outstanding. It is a gradual growth where you become a great people in Egypt. "Mitzvonim Shom" - great in stature - not numbers but quality. Through them the whole of mankind will change as we pray on Rosh Hashanah.

Abraham began to think that this process could be shortened. Yitzchak wanted to go to Mitzraim but G-d stopped him. "No, it will be a long process. You'd accomplish; don't go!" When the Mitzvah of Milah was addressed to him, Abraham was taken aback. If there was a Mitzvah not understood by the gentile, which made the Jew esoteric and removed, it is "milah". Till the Holocaust it was "milah", which identified the Jew and, therefore, more women were saved. If it were not for "milah" the entire Middle East would have been converted to Judaism. "Milah" has isolated and locked up the Jew in solitude. "Milah" splits; it is the dividing symbol.

Abraham asked: "After 'Milah' do you think they'll be the same friends, the same partners? We won't be one people; they'll treat me as a distant stranger." This is what Abraham asked. He was not reluctant but wanted to understand. G-d declared: "I want you to be different. We are different. They write left to right; we write right to left. They calculate time around the sun; we calculate around the moon. Our observation of "Avaloth" -- mourning is completely different. So is our kindness in giving zokah, our modesty. Of course, many have dropped this uniqueness. There is some charisma which is different. It is an individual personality. This is what

Abraham asks: "Will I be the same?" G-d answers, "It is not necessary to be respected or beloved. What is the creation of the world? It is "Dai" - self-limitation. He retreated and gave space to the world. It is self-contraction!

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**Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger**  
**Shalom Bayis**

Perhaps one of the most charming comments of Rashi, if one is allowed to describe the words of our master in that way, explains the seeming banter of the angels as they visit the ailing Avrohom. Their inquiry into the whereabouts of Sarah, indicating an interest in the mundane or an ignorance of something important, is less than angelic. Therefore, Rashi explains that they certainly knew that Sarah was at home but they wanted to increase the harmony of the patriarchal tent by impressing upon Avrohom the modesty which informed all that was Sarah. Did this ninety year old couple of towering spirituality, who had weathered so much together still need to be reminded of each other's traits? Indeed, explained Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, previous Rosh Yeshiva of Mir in Yerushalyim, it really never ends and even Avrohom and Sarah would still have to consciously invest in the harmony of their home.

It is in this setting that Hashem himself impresses upon us the supreme importance of shalom bayis. He inaccurately quotes Sarah to Avrohom to avoid any ill feelings that may have been caused as Sarah refers to her husband's old age. Thus Chazal conclude that there are times and situations where shalom bayis, the concern for a harmonious and respectful home, trumps the integrity that is always demanded of us in all that we pursue.

I believe the timing of this lesson is instructive. Avrohom and Sarah are about to welcome Yitzchok into their lives and no doubt take every effort to assure that their home nurtures in Yitzchok the concern for Hashem's will that is their life. Apparently this can best be accomplished in a peaceful harmonious setting informed with respect for each other and the stability that it generates.

The sacrifice that Hashem made for the peacefulness of Sarah's home should not be lost on us. Chazal see Hashem as defined by truth, and declare that His "seal" is truth. Truth and consistency are the basis of our allegiance to Revelation and all the demands that ensued from it. It is perhaps of greater significance and not all unlike, the erasure of His name that He suffers for the sotah woman in an attempt to restore the trust of her husband. It would follow that Hashem is challenging husband and wife to be willing to let go of personal ambitions and aspirations to build a home that vibrates with the concern and respect for all its members. This home built on the bonds of loving spouses will provide the warmth that will nurture another generation of "ovdei Hashem".

Is there a value to shalom bayis, if it causes the loss of personal principle? Perhaps we will have built a beautiful frame, but one which is seriously lacking in the messages that we wish to communicate?

Perhaps Hashem is, upon deeper thought, teaching us that shalom bayis is a goal and accomplishment that stands on its own, not merely as a tool to create a stable setting for the teaching of Torah. That is why Hashem's name and His beloved truth can be bartered for a peaceful home.

Indeed bringing two disparate and often very different worlds together is the very work of creation. The days of creation saw fire and water, land and water, the physical and nonphysical all brought together in perfect harmony. How much pride Hashem must have from His children as they try to imitate His work on which He founded all that we have come to know.

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From: [ravfrand-owner@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand-owner@torah.org) on behalf of **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** [[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)] Sent: November 09, 2006 12:45 PM To: [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org) Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayera

#### The Difference Between a 'Baal Chessed' and a Welfare Giver

At the start of this week's parsha, the Almighty appears to Avraham, who was sitting at the doorway of his tent "in the heat of the day" [Bereshis 18:1]. Rashi quotes a teaching of Chazal: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, brought the sun out of its sheath (i.e. He made it shine intensely), so as not to trouble Avraham (who at the age of 100 had just undergone circumcision), and because He saw that Avraham was pained that no visitors were coming, He brought the angels to him in the form of men."

The question must be asked, why was Avraham pained by the fact that he had no guests? We understand that Avraham was a Baal Chessed ['Master of kindness'] who would go out of his way -- even while suffering the pain of recovery from a major operation -- to help out wayfarers in need. But if there was not anyone on the road (because of extreme weather conditions), there would not be anyone in need of food or drink or a place to stay. Everyone would ostensibly be comfortably resting in their own homes.

We know what happens on the night of a big snowstorm. People are not on the streets. We do not need to worry if the streets are empty -- we know everyone is sitting at home, warm and cozy. Everyone is taken care of!

Avraham should have been thrilled by the hot weather. No one was on the road. Everyone was happy and taken care of. Why was he pained? What was his problem?

The premise of our question is that the 'tachlis' [purpose] of a 'Baal Chessed' is to provide for people's needs, and if no one is in need, the 'Baal Chessed' should not have anything to do.

However, our premise is incorrect. Avraham Avinu is indeed the personification of a 'Baal Chessed', but he is the personification of a Jewish Baal Chessed', not the personification of a welfare dispenser. The Government gives welfare. It gives welfare because people need welfare, and would be very happy if no one was in need of welfare.

Agencies that help the poor or homeless ideally would prefer to have no business. They dream of a world where no one is homeless and everyone has food. It is ostensibly the goal of every helping agency to go out of business.

This is the case of someone interested in providing welfare. But the 'Baal Chessed' realizes that "more than the homeowner provides for the poor person, the poor person provides for the homeowner." [Vayikra Rabba 34] A Jew needs to perform Chessed -- "not for YOUR sake, but for MY sake!" To become a better human being, to become a human being in the image of the Almighty, emulating HIM in the most perfect way, I MUST do Chessed.

Therefore, it doesn't follow that if everyone is taken care of, then I can be happy and not have to worry about dispensing welfare. If Avraham Avinu is incapable of providing Chessed -- for whatever reason -- then he knows that he is not doing what he is supposed to be doing.

#### Sarah Should Have Sent 'Amen'

This week's Parsha contains a comment of the Ramba"n that is very novel.

Sarah overhears the news that the "guests" delivered to her husband that she would become pregnant and have a child. She laughed inwardly asking incredulously, "After I have withered shall I again have clear skin? And my husband is old!" [Bereshis 18:12]

The Almighty was apparently upset with her reaction. In the very next pasuk [verse], Hashem asks Avraham, "Why did Sarah laugh saying: 'Is it even true that I shall give birth though I have aged?' Is anything beyond Hashem?" [Bereshis 18:13]

The Ramba"n asks why the Almighty was upset at Sarah's quite natural reaction. The "news" that she heard was not delivered (according to her

perception) by great individuals or even by righteous people. As far as she knew, an idol-worshipping Arab delivered this message.

This would be as if we found ourselves walking on the street and some nut would approach us and announce to us that we will soon win the lottery. Would we be expected upon hearing such 'news' to bow down and express gratitude to the Master of the Universe? We would more than likely dismiss our "good tidings bearer" as some kind of lunatic!

Sarah had such characters coming through her house every day. Why should the Almighty have complaints against Sarah for not taking the news seriously? She did not know they were Angels. She thought they were crazy!

The Ramba"n teaches us an interesting lesson. He says that Sarah should have said "Amen! May this be G-d's Will!"

The implication is that the next time we walk on the streets of Baltimore and some panhandler asks for a quarter and we give him a quarter and the panhandler says "You should win the Maryland State Lottery" our answer should be "Amen!"

If we fail to respond "Amen" to such a situation, G-d may have complaints against us.

Someone quoted an amazing story from the Steipler Gaon, related to this exact point. A person came to the Steipler and told him that he needed a blessing for his daughter. She was 27 years old and in need of a shidduch [marriage partner].

The Steipler asked him if it was his first daughter. The man replied that it was actually his third daughter. The Steipler then asked if when this daughter was born, her father made a Kiddush to celebrate her birth. The man admitted that although he had made celebrations when his first two daughters were born, by the third daughter, he, in fact, did not make a Kiddush to celebrate her birth.

The Steipler then advised him to go make a Kiddush for this 27 year old daughter. He said, "When you make a Kiddush, people come and give you brachos [blessings] for you and your daughter. They wish you Mazal Tov. They express all sorts of good wishes. Today, it is appropriate to wish fathers of newborn daughters a blessing that the father should find a shidduch easily for his daughter. People express such sentiments on such occasions. Twenty-seven years ago, you prevented your daughter from receiving those good wishes from the well-wishers you could have invited to your Kiddush. You never know from whence comes the bracha that will be heard in Heaven. The Almighty has all sorts of conduits for His blessing to take effect."

The Steipler continued, "Who knows, there might have been some neighbor or someone you met in shul who you could have invited by saying 'come, I'm making a Kiddush, I had a new daughter born this week'. He would have come in and taken a piece of cake and a little kuggle. He would have made a 'lechayim' and taken a shot of whiskey and then wished you: 'you should have an easy upbringing for her and you should find a good shidduch and be able to marry her off to a fine Talmid Chochom'. You could have responded "AMEN!" But you did not let that happen. You prevented your daughter from receiving all those blessings. Go now at age 27 and make a Kiddush for your daughter."

The end of the story is that the father did make the belated Kiddush and she soon thereafter became a Kallah.

This is exactly what the meaning of the Ramba"n. The complaint is not that Sarah did not BELIEVE the blessing of the Arab would come true. The complaint is that she did not HOPE that it would come true. The complaint is that she did not respond with the word "Amen".

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From Rav Goldwicht [[rgoldwicht@yutorah.org](mailto:rgoldwicht@yutorah.org)] Sent: November 08, 2006 11:27 PM To: Subject: Parashat VaYeira 5767 WEEKLY INSIGHTS BY **RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT**  
Parashat VaYeira 5767

At the end of this week's parasha, the Torah tells us that Avraham built a mizbeach (altar) upon which to sacrifice his son, Yitzchak. This is the fourth mizbeach built by Avraham. In Parashat Lech Lecha, he builds one at his first stop in Eretz Yisrael, Shchem, where HaKadosh Baruch Hu informs him that his descendants would inherit the land. He builds a second one between Beit El and Ay. He builds his third mizbeach in Chevron, after returning from Mitzrayim, when Hashem tells him, "Kum hithalech ba'aretz...ki l'cha etmenah, Go walk in the land...for to you I shall give it" (Bereishit 13:18).

The second mizbeach, built between Beit El and Ay, is significant in that it is the only mizbeach to which Avraham Avinu returns. After he returns from Mitzrayim, the Torah says that Avraham traveled from the South to the place of the mizbeach he had made between Beit El and Ay (13:4). Rashi, based on the gemara in Sanhedrin, teaches that Avraham saw through ruach hakodesh that his descendants, B'nei Yisrael, would lose a battle against Ay after conquering Yericho, and Avraham Avinu wished to daven for them. If this mizbeach is so significant, though, in that it is the only one to which Avraham returns, why does the Torah not tell us its exact location? Why is it referred to as the mizbeach "between Beit El and Ay"?

In Yehoshua (perek 7), the navi tells us that before going into battle against Ay, Yehoshua sent scouts, who determined that it would be sufficient to send a small contingent of the army to conquer Ay. However, when B'nei Yisrael actually go out to battle Ay, the soldiers of Ay defeat them. B'nei Yisrael becomes despondent, their hearts melting like water. The question here is what exactly happened. Surely B'nei Yisrael didn't succeed in battle, but why was this such a significant defeat that their "hearts melted"?

After this loss, HaKadosh Baruch Hu explains to Yehoshua that "Israel has sinned, transgressed My covenant...taken from the cheirem, stolen and denied" (Yehoshua 7:11). Why does HaKadosh Baruch Hu speak in the plural, as if all B'nei Yisrael has sinned, when the truth is that only one man, Achan, took from the spoils of Yericho that had been designated for Hashem?

In taking Yericho, B'nei Yisrael were commanded to circle the city once every day. On the seventh day, B'nei Yisrael were commanded to circle the city seven times, and on the seventh time, the kohanim sounded shofars and the entire nation shouted in unison. So great was the noise that it was heard across Eretz Yisrael. At this point, HaKadosh Baruch Hu took down the walls of Yericho miraculously and everyone witnessed His greatness and salvation. But Achan believed that B'nei Yisrael had played a part in bringing down the walls of Yericho as well. Although Hashem certainly had performed great miracles, even 99% of the work, B'nei Yisrael's shouting helped bring the walls down. In other words, Achan felt that he was a partner in victory, deserving a portion of the spoils, and he therefore took from the cherm.

Achan was certainly not the only person to feel this way. His actions represented a mentality among B'nei Yisrael. HaKadosh Baruch Hu therefore felt it necessary to make it clear to all before entering Eretz Yisrael that everything comes from Him and only Him. Once He has provided, then does our partnership begin. Only to protect that which He has bestowed upon us. He is the ba'al milchamot, the matzmiach yeshuot, and He works alone. This is what Hashem wanted to clarify, and this is why He

spoke in the plural, to address all those who agreed with Achan but had not acted on their belief.

When Avraham Avinu returned from Mitzrayim with great wealth, he was concerned that he might arrive at a "kochi v'otzem yadi, my strength and ability" mentality. He therefore returned to the mizbeach between Beit El and Ay, because Ay represents the kochi v'otzem yadi mentality (and it is for this reason we lost in battle), while Beit El represents the mentality of "kol asher titen li aser a'asrenu lach, everything You give me I will tithe for You," that everything comes from Hashem. The location of the mizbeach cannot be pinpointed because it resides somewhere along the continuum of kochi v'otzem yadi and kol asher titen li. If we forget that HaKadosh Baruch Hu gives us the strength, the capabilities, the siyata dishmaya, we lean towards Ay. If we remember that everything comes from Him and Him alone, we approach Beit El, and the closer we come to Beit El, the closer we come to Yerushalayim as well.

Living today, in the era of technology and scientific advance, it is very easy to forget Hashem and fall prey to the kochi v'otzem yadi mentality. It is very easy to think we have created, we have invented, we have discovered. These feelings bring us towards Ay, a city that is in ruins to this day. If we remember that Hashem gives us the tools and the siyata dishmaya to create, invent, discover, we come closer to Beit El and Yerushalayim.

May Hashem grant us the strength to follow in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu, rising along the path towards Beit El and that greatest of mountains, Yerushalayim.

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#### WINE

The past weeks have delivered to us a spate of articles about the beneficial aspects of drinking red wine. It seems that researchers have shown that obese rats who receive large doses of the stuff that is in red wine show little negative effects from their being grossly overweight. While these findings have as yet not been transferred to influence the human population it has long been known that drinking a glass of red wine every night at dinner does have healthful consequences regarding heart and arterial diseases in humans.

Wine plays a great role in Jewish life and tradition as well. It is considered a holy drink – the only liquid drink that, before consuming, has its own special blessing. Wine is part of all life cycle events in Jewish life. It appears at weddings and circumcisions, redemptions of the first-born and in Talmudic times at the house of the mourners. There are many non-Ashkenazic groups of Jews today who still continue the custom of drinking wine and reciting special blessings in the house of mourners.

Wine is meant to inspire and comfort us, to lend dignity and importance to an occasion, to raise an ordinary or even extraordinary human event to a higher spiritual level. It is the blessing over the cup of wine that constitutes the Kiddush ceremony that ushers the holy Sabbath into our homes. It is wine or its equivalent that is the centerpiece of the havdala service when we take leave of the Sabbath.

When a large enough quorum of people has eaten together it is again the cup of wine and its attendant blessing that concludes the grace after meals. The required drinking of the four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder serves as the guidepost to that holy occasion. As is obvious from all of this, wine is very important in Jewish ritual life.

But like most things in life, wine is a double-edged sword. The same beverage that is the symbol of holiness and sanctification is also the potential for drunkenness and dissolute behavior. The rabbis of the Midrash were critical of Noah for planting a vineyard as his first project after emerging from the ark that saved him from the great flood.

Noah himself paid a great price for this error of judgment, becoming drunk and then being violated by his own grandson. The Bible teaches us that "When wine enters, hidden things [about the drinker] are revealed." The Bible records that a gala feast preceded Joseph's revelation to his brothers where the amount of wine consumed brought about an aura of drunkenness. It was at that meal that Joseph first sensed the regret that the brothers had over their act of betrayal, of having sold him as a slave to Egyptian captivity. After they had the wine, the hidden things buried deep within their hearts were revealed. Wine also leads to joy and contentment. The verse in Psalms reads: "And wine makes the heart of humans glad."

Again, just as in every other facet of life, wine's positive and negative effects are determined by the moderation, appropriateness and wisdom in using and consuming it. I have always felt that this is perhaps one of the reasons why wine has its own special blessing both before and after consumption – to remind us of its special quality and to caution us to drink it wisely, with holy intent and purpose.

Jews always placed a special premium and importance on wine produced in the Land of Israel. The great Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, the head of the famed yeshiva of Volozhin in nineteenth century Lithuania was one of the founders of the Lovers of Zion organization of that time. When Baron Rothschild's Carmel Wineries produced its first bottles of wine, one of these bottles of wine was sent as a gift to the great rabbi in Volozhin.

Rabbi Baruch Epstein, the nephew of Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, was present at the moment the bottle of wine finally arrived at its destination in Volozhin. He records for us that as a sign of love, respect and emotional joy at having in his hand a bottle of wine produced by Jewish vintners living in the Land of Israel, Rabbi Berlin went into his bedroom and put on his Sabbath garments in honor of that bottle of wine. The bottle of wine was the harbinger of the return of the Jewish people to their homeland. So, as we drink our daily portion of red Israeli wine and toast to our life and health, we should also recall the innate history and holiness associated with wine in Jewish life, especially wine made from grapes grown and produced in the Land of Israel.

WeeklyParsha 20 Heshvan 5767 / 11

VAYERA

<http://www.rabbiwein.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=21>

51 One of the more intriguing episodes in the parsha of this week is the story of the three visitors to the tent of Avraham and Sarah. The Torah first describes the three visitors as anashim – human beings. And that is how Avraham certainly saw them – as Bedouin Arabs whom he suspected of being idol worshippers who sanctified the dust on their feet. Therefore, he gently requests them to wash their feet before sitting down to eat their meal at his home.

Judaism, which always operates in reverse venerations to paganism, therefore bids us to wash our hands before we sit down at a meal to break bread. But in any event, it is clear from the text of the Torah that these visitors to Avraham and Sarah are simply viewed as being three passing human strangers at the beginning of their visit. Suddenly, Avraham realizes that these three visitors are really God's angels sent to him to reveal God's plans and to fulfill His Divine mission.

The Torah now calls them malachim – angels. I have always felt that there was a deep subliminal message in this change of description of

Avraham's guests. Namely, that coming into the tent of Avraham and Sarah can by itself transform seemingly pagan Bedouin Arabs into heavenly angels. Such is the effect of Avraham in the world and such is the influence of the tent of Avraham and Sarah in their society. The Hittites will be moved to say: "You are a prince of G-d in our midst." And so he was.

The Jewish home was always the place of individual spiritual elevation and holy transformation. It was the factory that produced holy and devoted people, conscious of their responsibilities to G-d and humankind. With its rituals and rhythms, with its silences and loving disciplines, with its peace and the serenity of the Sabbath and the Holy days, the Jewish home was able to transform and uplift people.

I once had a tradesperson – a woman drapery designer - come to our home Friday early afternoon to give an estimate on draping our windows. Our home, due to the influence of my wife, was a place of serenity and calm on Friday afternoons as it pretty much was at all times. The woman remarked to me as she left: "I have never felt such a feeling of serenity as I do in your home." I explained to her that the transformation was due to the upcoming arrival of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is serenity and the only way to welcome it is with serenity itself. The Jewish home was the direct descendant of the tent of Avraham and Sarah. It genetically inherited the transcendent ability to sanctify, enhance and transform human beings. It provides the setting and milieu for human beings to work on becoming angels.

The privilege to be visited by angels can be experienced by all of us. We welcome them to our home every Friday night at the onset of the Sabbath and we can have them accompany us all week long as well, if we only will it. Such is the legacy of Avraham and Sarah to us, their children.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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From: [peninim-bounces@shemayisrael.com](mailto:peninim-bounces@shemayisrael.com) on behalf of Shema Yisrael Torah Network [[shemalist@shemayisrael.com](mailto:shemalist@shemayisrael.com)] Sent: November 09, 2006 2:55 AM To: Peninim Parsha

**Peninim on the Torah**

**by Simcha Groffman**

- Parshas Vayera

..

So the men got up from there, gazed down toward Sodom... the men had turned from there and went to Sodom, while Avraham was still standing before Hashem. (18:16, 22)

Is there any difference from where they turned? The pasuk seems to emphasize that they turned from "there." We know "where" they were. They were visiting with Avraham Avinu, and it is from his hospitality that they continued on to Sodom. Sforno comments on the words Vayifnu mi'sham ha'anashim, "the men turned from 'there,'" from the house of chesed, kindness that was Avraham's. This means that they had left a home that was the epitome of kindness to go to a place that had descended to the nadir of depravity. Prior to this, the pasuk also emphasizes that the men gazed down from "there." Simply, this means that when one stands in Avraham Avinu's home, a home exemplifying loving kindness at its zenith,

the stark contrast of Sodom glares at you. The evil perpetrated by the Sodomites was magnified when viewed from the vantage point of Avraham's house.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, takes this idea a bit further. He explains that one who was born deprived of the gift of sight, who never in his life saw light or colors, can never fully understand their meaning. An individual who was once able to see clearly, but has lost his ability to see, can understand and mentally perceive various colors. This is the condemnation against the people of Sodom: You were able to see! You once saw and understood the meaning of kindness and human decency. You have no excuse for your actions. Had you been born and raised in some remote village on a backward continent, totally secluded from human interaction, then the critique for your nefarious behavior might not be as intense. However, you lived in the vicinity of Avraham Avinu, an individual who personified loving kindness at its apex. You knew what was right and what was wrong. Yet, you chose to live a life of evil, a life of preying on those weaker than you, a life of taking advantage of the unfortunate and the needy, a life of miscreancy. Yes, the angels looked down from Avraham's house, because the view from that vantage point was much more odious. The Sodomites had no excuse. They had no one to blame but themselves.

The same idea applies to each and every one of us. Every Jew, regardless of his background or upbringing, if he is born with a mind, can reach Hashem. He was created in the image of Hashem, with a neshamah, soul, that consists of a part of Hashem Above. What excuse does he have for not finding Hashem? At least he should search! If he searches seriously, he will find the path to Hashem. It just takes an intelligent mind - that functions!

Yet, one who has never studied Torah, who has never experienced the sweetness of a blatt, folio, of Talmud, who has never been excited over the penetrating logic of our Chazal, does have a degree of mitigation. He can plead ignorance as a way of exculpating himself. This might recuse him to a certain degree, but what about he who had studied Torah, who had imbibed of its profundities, who had experienced its lessons and savored its sweetness - what is his excuse? He knew what a Jew was. He understood the definition of a human being. He understood the meaning of spirituality. Yet, he decided to close his eyes and ignore everything that he had seen.

The angels arose from Avraham's home to look at Sodom. It was a glaring and penetrating stare. They were looking from Avraham's home, saying to the Sodomites, "You see what Avraham is and what his activities are. You are neighbors with a kind, loving example of what a human being is to be. How can you, after seeing all of this, commit your vile cruelty against people? How can you allow yourselves to sink into the quicksand of foolishness, evil and contamination? You know better; you have seen the light. So, why do you hide your head in the darkness?" Their proximity to Avraham's home magnified their sins and sealed their punishment.

Avraham responded and said... "Although I am but dust and ash." (18:27)

Our Patriarch compares himself to two lowly materials: afar and eifar, dust and ash. What is the significance of these two materials in the context of Avraham Avinu's response to Hashem? The Netziv, zl, explains that afar, dust, has an advantage in that it has the koach ha'toladah, power to give birth, to produce, to serve as the catalyst for creating something else. It does not, however, have a relationship to an av, father, a previous generation. It has been created by Hashem in its present state. It is what it is because of its own essential nature. It is not born of anything else.

Eifar, ash, on the other hand, is the end product of a coal, an ember, a piece of wood, or whatever material was burned into ash. It has a "past." It has yichus, pedigree. It, however, does not have the advantage of afar, in that it cannot be used to create something else. There is no power of toladah, creativity, in it. Afar has a future, but no past. Eifar has a past, but no future.

When Avraham entreated Hashem, he said, "Ribono Shel Olam, I am but dust and ash. I am like dust that I have no zchus avos, ancestral merit, as

my father was an idolater. Likewise, I have no future in that I am childless, similar to ash which is an end product. Because of Avraham's poignant prayer, a prayer in which he presented himself as being totally unworthy, Hashem granted him two unique gifts that would serve his descendants: the afar sotah, dust used for a wayward wife, which, when used, provides the opportunity for creating shalom bayis, marital harmony and bliss, in a home; and the eifar Parah Adumah, ash of the Red Heifer, which is used to purify a person who has contracted tumaas meis, ritual contamination from coming in contact with a corpse. Avraham's unprecedented humility, his total self-abnegation, served as the precursor for his progeny to receive the two mitzvos that would elevate the kedushah, holiness, of Klal Yisrael.

The greater, more elevated an individual is, the more penetrating is his understanding of his inadequacy. Humility should be the result of a deeper understanding of Hashem and His World, thereby recognizing one's inconsequence. One who is all wrapped up in himself does not see beyond himself. In Sefer Tehillim 17:18, David Hamelech entreats Hashem with the words, Shamreini k'ishon bas ayin, "Guard me like the pupil of an eye." The Radak comments that the root of the word ishon, pupil of the eye, is ish, man. The relationship between the two words is to be found in the fact that when one looks into the pupil of another person's eye, he sees a reflection of himself. He sees a reflection of a "man." He adds that the letters vav and nun, which are the suffixes to the word ish, creating the word ishon, are used to signify a diminutive. Thus, ishon means a small man. If one looks into someone's eye, he sees a miniature reflection of himself. He sees a small man.

Rabbi Paysach Krohn relates that, upon hearing this interpretation of the Radak, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, the venerable Rosh Hayeshivah of Telshe, added that a powerful lesson may be derived from here. When one looks at another person, he is inclined to view himself as superior to him, thus deserving of his honor and recognition. The Torah is alluding to a different perspective that one should have when he looks at another individual. He should "see" himself as inferior to him and, therefore, look for the other person's virtues and attributes that elevate him. As far as he himself is concerned, the diminutive image he has of himself in the pupil of the other person's eye will suffice.

In his hesped, eulogy, for Horav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, zl, Horav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Riff, zl, describes this extraordinary gadol, Torah giant, as a man of singular greatness. He not only shielded his true measure of greatness from the public realm, he managed to "hide himself" from his immediate family and friends. Who would imagine that this frail, sickly, man would arise every midnight to recite Tikkun chatzos, a prayer lamenting the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and the ensuing exile? He was an individual who personally carried on his shoulders the financial concerns of thousands of families through the world, yet he never revealed to anyone who these families were.

Erudite in every area of Torah, his encyclopedic knowledge of Talmud Bavli, Yerushalmi and the four tracts of Shulchan Aruch was affirmed, but never publicized. He never sat at the dais at conventions or meetings, never voiced his opinion in public. Yet, behind the scenes he was the prime mover of many endeavors in support of needy Torah scholars. He was a leader who led from behind, whose presence was felt, but not seen. Humility was not just his virtue; it was his essence.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear father and grandfather Arthur I. Genshaft Yitzchak ben Yisrael z"l niftar 18 Cheshvan 5739

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From: Sent: Friday, October 27, 2006 10:07 AM To: Subject: Sacks  
<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation  
Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

## Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - currently 5765]

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Vayera The Miracle of a Child

There is a mystery at the heart of Jewish existence, engraved into the first syllables of our recorded time.

The first words of G-d to Abraham were: "Go out from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house . . . And I will make you a great nation . . ."

In the next chapter there is another promise: "I will make your children like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, so shall your offspring be counted."

Two chapters later comes a third: "G-d took him outside and said, 'Look at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them.' Then He said to him, 'So shall your children be.'"

Finally, the fourth: "Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."

Four escalating promises: Abraham would be the father of a great nation, as many as the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky. He would be the father not of one nation but of many.

What, though, was the reality? Early in the story, we read that Abraham was "very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold." He had everything except one thing - a child. Then G-d appeared to Abraham and said, "Your reward will be very great."

Until now, Abraham has been silent. Now, something within him breaks, and he asks: "O Lord G-d, what will you give me if I remain childless?" The first recorded words of Abraham to G-d are a plea for there to be future generations. The first Jew feared he would be the last.

Then a child is born. Sarah gives Abraham her handmaid Hagar, hoping that she will give him a child. She gives birth to a son whose name is Ishmael, meaning "G-d has heard." Abraham's prayer has been answered, or so we think. But in the next chapter, that hope is destroyed. Yes, says G-d, Ishmael will be blessed. He will be the father of twelve princes and a great nation. But he is not the child of Jewish destiny, and one day Abraham will have to part from him.

This pains Abraham deeply. He pleads: "If only Ishmael might live under Your blessing." Later, when Sarah drives Ishmael away, we read that "This distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son." Nonetheless, the decree remains.

G-d insists that Abraham will have a son by Sarah. Both laugh. How can it be? They are old. Sarah is post-menopausal. Yet against possibility, the son is born. His name is Isaac, meaning "laughter":

Sarah said, "G-d has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." Finally, the story seems to have a happy ending. After all the promises and prayers, Abraham and Sarah at last have a child. Then come the words which, in all the intervening centuries, have not lost their power to shock:

After these things, G-d tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then G-d said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you." Abraham takes his son, travels for three days, climbs the mountain, prepares the wood, ties his son, takes the knife and raises his hand. Then a voice is heard from heaven: "Do not lay a hand on the boy." The trial is over. Isaac lives.

Why all the promises and disappointments? Why the hope so often raised, so often unfulfilled? Why delay? Why Ishmael? Why the binding? Why put Abraham and Sarah through the agony of thinking that the son for whom they have waited for so long is about to die?

There are many answers in our tradition, but one transcends all others. We cherish what we wait for and what we most risk losing. Life is full of wonders. The birth of a child is a miracle. Yet, precisely because these things are natural, we take them for granted, forgetting that nature has an architect, and history an author.

Judaism is a sustained discipline in not taking life for granted. We were the people born in slavery so that we would value freedom. We were the nation always small, so that we would know that strength does not lie in numbers but in the faith that begets courage. Our ancestors walked through the valley of the shadow of death, so that we could never forget the sanctity of life.

Throughout history, Jews were called on to value children. Our entire value system is built on it. Our citadels are schools, our passion, education, and our greatest heroes, teachers. The seder service on Pesach can only begin with questions asked by a child. On the first day of the New Year, we read not about the creation of the universe but about the birth of a child - Isaac to Sarah, Samuel to Hannah. Ours is a supremely child-centred faith.

That is why, at the dawn of Jewish time, G-d put Abraham and Sarah through these trials - the long wait, the unmet hope, the binding itself - so that neither they nor their descendants would ever take children for granted. Every child is a miracle. Being a parent is the closest we get to G-d - bringing life into being through an act of love.

Today, when too many children live in poverty and illiteracy, dying for lack of medical attention because those who rule nations prefer weapons to welfare, hostage-taking to hospital-building, fighting the battles of the past rather than shaping a safe future, it is a lesson the world has not yet learned. For the sake of humanity it must, for the tragedy is vast and the hour is late.

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From: Sent: Saturday, July 15, 2006 11:18 PM To: Subject: toczek  
<http://www.anshe.org/parsha.htm#parsha> Parsha Page by Fred Toczek -  
A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)  
Veyevirah 5757 & 5762

### I. Summary

A. Abraham Is Visited By Three Angels; The Promise of Yitchak (Isaac). Three days after his Bris, Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent hoping to greet visitors. Three individuals (actually disguised angels sent by Hashem to perform special duties) appeared. Abraham ran to welcome them and show them hospitality. One of the angels told Abraham that Sarah would give birth to a son in a year. Sarah (then almost 90) laughed inwardly at the news, for which Hashem rebuked her for doubting Him. Before leaving, the second angel healed Abraham's pain/sickness from his Bris.

B. Abraham Intercedes On Behalf of S'Dome and Amorah. Before the third angel began the destruction of S'dome and Amorah, Hashem forewarned Abraham. Abraham prayed on the people's behalf, and argued with Hashem that they should be spared if at least ten righteous people could be found among them.

C. The Angels Arrive in S'Dome. Two of the angels arrived in S'dome (i.e., one of them was there to save Lot and his family; the other was there to destroy the city). The angels -- still outwardly mere humans -- were invited by Lot to stay with him and his family. When word got out, the townspeople gathered around Lot's house and tried to molest the angels, for which Hashem punished them with blindness.

D. Lot and his Family Leave S'Dome; The Cities Are Destroyed. The angels told Lot of Hashem's plan and instructed him to leave with his family. Lot, concerned about his money and possessions, hesitated but was placed (along with his family) by the angels outside the city. The angels warned them not to look back (since they were only being saved through Abraham's merit, they had no right to observe the others' punishment) and to stay away from the plains surrounding the cities. At Lot's request, Hashem allowed them to stay in Tzoar. Hashem then destroyed the cities of S'dome, Amorah and the entire surrounding plains. When Lot's wife

disobeyed the angels' warning and looked back, Hashem turned her into a "pillar of salt". Lot moved into a cave in a nearby mountainous area.

E. Abraham and Sarah Travel to Gerar. Abraham and Sarah traveled to the Negev (the South of Israel) to Gerar, where Abraham again instructed Sarah to say that she was his sister. Sarah was taken into King Avimelech's household; however, when Hashem caused illness to befall his household and warned him that he would die if he didn't release Sarah to Abraham, Avimelech complied. Abraham prayed for him and Hashem cured his household.

F. Yitzchak is born; Hagar & Yishmael are sent away. As promised, Yitzchak was born to Abraham and Sarah one year later. (See attached chart for family tree.) Abraham circumcised Yitzchak when he was 8-days old. As Yitzchak was growing up, Sarah feared Yishmael's negative influence and urged Abraham to send him and Hagar away. Abraham was unhappy with Sarah's request, but Hashem told him to follow Sarah's advise and promised that Yishmael would become a large nation. Abraham gave Hagar and Yishmael food and water and sent them into wilderness, where they wandered for days. When it appeared that they might die from thirst, an angel appeared, showing them water and assuring Hagar of Yishmael's future. Yishmael grew up to be a bowman and lived in Paran.

G. The Akeidah ("Binding of Yitzchak"). As the tenth (and most difficult) test of his loyalty to Hashem, Hashem instructed Abraham to sacrifice Yitzchak. Without hesitation, Abraham awoke early the next morning, made the necessary preparations himself, and began the journey to take Yitzchak to a place to be designated by Hashem. They arrived at this place three days later. Abraham built an altar and bound Yitzchak. As he lifted the knife to sacrifice Yitzchak, an angel called out and instructed him not to harm Yitzchak. Abraham found a ram and sacrificed it instead. In recognition of his great "z'chus" (merit), Hashem promised to bless him and that this children would be many and his descendants would inherit their enemies' cities.

## II. Divrei Torah

### A. Lil'Mode U'lilamed (**Rabbi Mordechai Katz**)

The Importance of "Chesed" (kindness) and "Hachnosas Orchim" (hospitality). Abraham was the model of "chesed" and "hachnosas orchim". Even while recovering from his Bris and despite the intense heat, Abraham still extended tremendous hospitality to the three visitors. What's more, Abraham ensured that his guests would feel like they were imposing, promising them a mere "morsel of bread", yet giving them an elaborate meal. Once a husband and wife were traveling through a village on Erev Shabbos when they happened to notice a small house. As they were very tired from the journey, they wanted to ask the owner to put them up, but were afraid that he/she would ask too high a price and so they decided to keep moving. However, the wheel on their carriage broke and they had no choice but to ask the owner to put them up for Shabbos. When they approached the owner, Rav Yeshaya, he told them the room rate was five Rubles (a large sum), but that they could eat as much as they wanted. Having no other choice, they agreed to his price, rationalizing that they could at least eat as heartily as they desired. As a result, they enjoyed their Shabbos meals very much, and slept quite peacefully. When Shabbos was over, however, Rav Yeshaya refused their money, saying "I never had any intention to take your money . . . however, I sensed that if I told you at the outset that I wouldn't accept money, you would feel very uncomfortable and would not accept our hospitality. I wanted you to enjoy Shabbos, and you did. That is payment enough."

### B. Growth Through Torah (**Rabbi Zelig Pliskin**)

1. Consider it an honor to do acts of kindness for another person. Abraham pleaded with the three men who passed near his tent to accept his hospitality, saying: "because you have passed by your servant." Rashi comments "this [to be my guest] I request of you because you have passed by, for my honor. Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz cites the Talmudic principle that when someone gives something to a distinguished person, the fact that

the person accepts your gift is considered as if you received something from him/her.

a. Giving to an important person is actually taking. But who is "important". To an arrogant person, everyone is considered beneath him/her. But a humble person considers everyone to be important. He honors and respects everyone and considers giving to any person as a personal favor to him. Abraham was such a person. While the three visitors appeared to be mere nomads, Abraham ran to greet them and bowed down before them. He personally felt more honor in their coming to be his guests than we would feel if the greatest people of our generation were to visit us.

b. Horav Nissan Alpert expounds on this (in Peninim on the Torah) --why would Hashem send angels, rather than humans which would have allowed Abraham to perform the actual mitzvah of charity and hospitality? From this, we learn an important lesson. One should not think that it is his act of charity which enables the poor individual to survive. Hashem has many agents and vehicles for taking care of His children, and these individuals would ultimately find another means of support. The purpose of the mitzvah of charity and hospitality is to benefit the giver, not the recipient. Just as Abraham was transformed into the beneficiary since the "poor people" were actually angels, so too we must realize that it is the giver who is indebted to the receiver.

2. Trust in Hashem and you will always have hope. We read the section respecting Yitzchak's birth on Rosh Hashonah. The reason for this is to develop hope and trust in Hashem. Nothing is impossible for Him. Sarah was already 90 years old and according to conventional wisdom it would have been impossible for her to give birth to a child. Yet, since Hashem willed it, she gave birth to Yitzchak. Even when a situation seems bleak and the probability for salvation seems unlikely, do not give up hope. Hashem's law is more powerful than the law of averages. This awareness is so important for our daily lives that at the beginning of each year we repeat the message: never despair!

### C. Majesty of Man (**Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz**)

1. Jealousy and Bitachon ("faith in Hashem"). In Midrash Rabbah, we find that Yitzchak was not an unwitting participant in the Akeidah -- to the contrary, he was an equal partner with Abraham. The Midrash relates how the Satan -- the evil inclination -- cunningly attempted to dissuade the pair from their mission. After failing with Abraham, he turned to Yitzchak and unsuccessfully tried many different arguments. The Satan then pointed out that following Yitzchak's death all of his prized possessions would be given to his brother Yishmael. It was this argument that caused Yitzchak pause (albeit for only the slightest moment). What was it about this argument? Even the kind, unselfish Yitzchak was momentarily affected by the evil passion of jealousy. In order to guard against the influence of jealousy, we must concentrate on strengthening our bitachon. There is no way to feel threatened by any situation or deprived of any object when we wholeheartedly believe that Hashem is taking care of us and we are totally in His hands.

2. Chesed and Kiddush Hashem ("sanctification of Hashem's name"). The Torah highlights Abraham's kindness to the three angels in elaborate details; yet, the written Torah doesn't make mention of a seemingly greater act performed by Abraham -- when forced by King Nimrod to accept idol worship or be burned alive, Abraham chose death by fire and refused to recant his beliefs (although Hashem allowed Abraham to miraculously emerge unharmed from the fiery furnace). Why isn't this episode emphasized, or even mentioned? Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel used this question to reveal a deeper understanding of the concept of "chesed" (kindness). Hashem created, and constantly sustains, the world with chesed. If we can define our limited comprehension of Hashem's actions towards ourselves and the universe in a single word, it is chesed. As an emulation of Hashem, Abraham's hospitality was the expression of his profound belief and recognition of Hashem. When filled with the devotion, totality of spirit and energy of Abraham, chesed has the potential to be the greatest "Kiddush Hashem", even greater than giving of one's life. The Torah



underscores the chesed of Abraham to enlighten us to the power we are capable of harnessing by helping one another. The Torah is telling us that not only by giving our lives, but by giving of ourselves to others, we also have the ability to rise to great heights. Opportunities abound.

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From: [weekly-halacha-owner@torah.org](mailto:weekly-halacha-owner@torah.org) on behalf of Jeffrey Gross [[jgross@torah.org](mailto:jgross@torah.org)] Sent: November 07, 2006 6:07 PM To: [weekly-halacha@torah.org](mailto:weekly-halacha@torah.org) Subject: Weekly Halacha - Parshas Vayeira

WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5767

By **Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights

A discussion of Halachic topics.

For final rulings, consult your Rav

### **THE BLESSING OF HA-GOMEL**

In the time of the Beis ha-Mikdash, a person who survived a potentially life-threatening situation brought a Korban Todah, a Thanksgiving Offering, to express his gratitude to Hashem.(1) The Talmud (2) defines crossing a desert or a sea, imprisonment and serious illness as potentially life-threatening situations.

Nowadays, when the Beis ha-Mikdash no longer stands and offerings cannot be brought on the Altar, we substitute a public proclamation of gratitude to Hashem for an offering.(3) A survivor of any of the perils mentioned above publicly recites Birkas ha-gomel, thanking Hashem for saving him from danger.

The text of the blessing is as follows: Baruch Atah... shegemalani kol (4) tov. After answering Amen(5) the congregation responds: Mi shegemalcha...(6)

Birkas ha-gomel, just like the Korban Todah,(7) is an optional mitzvah; it is not a pure obligation and one who fails to recite it does not commit a sin.(8) The poskim, however, strongly suggest that one be careful to fulfill this mitzvah, just as he would have seen to it to bring a Korban Todah if he had the opportunity to do so.(9)

In addition to reciting the ha-gomel blessing in lieu of the Korban Todah, Chayei Adam(10) writes that one should give a charitable donation equal to the value of the animal that he would have brought as a sacrifice. When giving the money, he should expressly state that he is donating the money instead of bringing a Korban Todah. He further instructs one to recite certain verses in the Torah which deal with Korban Todah(11) along with an additional text that he authored when he himself was saved from an explosion in the year 1804.

QUESTION: When and where is ha-gomel said?

DISCUSSION: As birkas ha-gomel is a public expression of gratitude, it cannot be recited in private. Indeed, the basic halachah follows the opinion that the blessing is said only in the presence of at least ten men. For this reason it became customary that ha-gomel is recited right after the public reading of the Torah. But like any other mitzvah, there are l'chatchilah and b'diavad methods of performing it. In addition, there are some recommendations which fall under the category of hiddur mitzvah. Let us elaborate:

#### **BIRKAS HA-GOMEL - L'CHATCHILAH:**

\* Birkas Ha-gomel should not be delayed more than three days after surviving a danger.(12) The custom is to recite ha-gomel at the soonest Kerias ha-Torah possible.(13)

\* At least ten men, including two Torah scholars and the one reciting ha-gomel, should be present.(14)

\* Birkas ha-gomel is recited immediately after the Kaddish which follows Kerias ha-Torah.

\* Birkas ha-gomel is recited while standing.(15)

\* Birkas ha-gomel should be recited during daytime hours only.(16)

\* If a number of people in shul are obligated to recite ha-gomel, each individual should recite his own (and not discharge his obligation by listening to another person's ha-gomel blessing).(17) If, however, they are

expressing gratitude for an incident which they experienced together, one person recites the blessing on behalf of everyone. The others respond: Mi shegemalanu kol tuv Hu yigmaleinu kol tov sela.(18)

#### **BIRKAS HA-GOMEL - B'DIAVAD / EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES:**

\* If three days elapsed, the blessing should be said within five days.(19) If five days passed, the blessing should be recited within thirty days. (20) If thirty days passed, the blessing may still be recited as long as the feelings of joy and gratitude are still alive in the mind of the survivor.(21)

\* If two Torah scholars are not available, the blessing is recited in front of any ten men, at any time.(22) [A minority view holds that under extenuating circumstances, ha-gomel is recited even with fewer than ten men present.(23) It is not customary, however, to do so.(24)]

\* Birkas ha-gomel may be recited even at night.

\* Birkas ha-gomel is valid if one was sitting when it was recited.(25)

\* One can fulfill his obligation of birkas ha-gomel by hearing the blessing recited by another person who is obligated to recite ha-gomel.(26)

#### **BIRKAS HA-GOMEL – HIDDUR MITZVAH:**

\* At least ten men, plus two Torah scholars, plus the one reciting the blessing (altogether thirteen men) should be present.(27) The more people present, the greater hiddur mitzvah there is.(28)

\* The one reciting birkas ha-gomel receives an aliyah to the Torah,(29) and after he recites the final blessing on the Torah, ha-gomel is recited. If he received the last aliyah, ha-gomel is recited before the Kaddish which follows Kerias ha-Torah.(30)

\* Although the one reciting birkas ha-gomel should be standing, those who are listening to the blessing should be seated.(31)

QUESTION: Do women recite the ha-gomel blessing?

DISCUSSION: Expressing gratitude to Hashem for His kindness to us is certainly incumbent upon women as well as men. Indeed, when the Beis ha-Mikdash was standing, women, too, brought a Korban Todah.(32) But traditionally among the Ashkenazim, women did not recite ha-gomel even though it was instituted as a substitute for the Korban Todah. This tradition developed because, as stated earlier, ha-gomel is recited in the presence of at least ten men, and it was considered immodest for a woman to make a public recitation. While many poskim questioned and criticized this tradition and suggested ways where women, too, might fulfill this mitzvah,(33) others maintained that the tradition be upheld and that women not recite birkas ha-gomel.(34)

Still, there are a number of options which a woman can choose in order to express her gratitude to Hashem:

\* While remaining in the women's section, she should recite birkas ha-gomel loudly enough for it to be heard by ten men. The men then respond with Mi shegemalch ... (35) This can also take place in the woman's home when ten men are present.(36)

\* She should answer Baruch Hashem ha-mevorach le'olam va'ed and Amen to her husband's aliyah to the Torah with the specific intent of fulfilling her obligation to thank Hashem for His grace to her.(37) Traditionally, this was the method used by women who wished to fulfill their obligation of expressing gratitude to Hashem after giving birth.(38)

\* Harav M. Feinstein is quoted as ruling that a woman may recite birkas ha-gomel in anyone's presence, man or woman. If she is married, she should preferably do so in her husband's presence.(39)

\* Harav S.Z. Auerbach suggested that upon reciting the morning blessing of ha-gomel chasadim tovim l'amo Yisrael, a woman should have in mind to fulfill this mitzvah as well.(40)

Although there are various opinions, the accepted custom today is that minors do not recite ha-gomel, nor does their father recite the blessing on their behalf.(41)

QUESTION: Which situations call for the recitation of birkas ha-gomel?

DISCUSSION: We mentioned above four categories of people who are supposed to recite ha-gomel. We will briefly discuss those categories and their modern counterparts:

## CROSSING A DESERT

Nowadays, a trip on a paved road through a desert is no more dangerous than a trip on an interstate highway; thus birkas ha-gomel is not recited. Still, were it to happen that one lost his way in a desert and survived, ha-gomel would be recited.(42)

## IMPRISONMENT

The poskim debate if this refers only to imprisonment in which one's life was endangered or threatened, such as being a prisoner of war, or even jail imprisonment for criminal activity, where one's life is not necessarily in danger. In practice, the individual case should be presented to a rav for a ruling, as many modern prisons can be quite dangerous.(43)

## SERIOUS ILLNESS

This includes recovery from any illness or medical situation which is or could be life-threatening,(44) or any surgery which required general anesthesia.(45) Many poskim maintain that if a patient is so weak that he remains bedridden for three consecutive days, ha-gomel is recited even if according to the doctors the patient's life was not in danger.(46)

Diagnosed mental illness which required that the patient be restrained or hospitalized is considered life-threatening, and birkas ha-gomel is recited upon recovery.(47)

Birkas ha-gomel should be recited upon complete recovery from the illness or condition, even if the patient needs to continue taking medication for his condition. If, according to the doctors, the patient will never completely regain his former strength, then ha-gomel is recited as soon as he is well enough to walk.

## SEA VOYAGE

This refers only to voyages far into the ocean that last several days.(48) However, it also includes shorter trips where harsh weather conditions threatened the safety of the passengers.

Whether or not to recite birkas ha-gomel after an airplane trip is a subject of much debate. There are three opinions:

1. It is doubtful whether ha-gomel may be recited,(49) unless a potentially dangerous situation developed during the flight.
2. Ha-gomel is recited only if the airplane crossed over an ocean or a desert.(50)
3. Ha-gomel is recited after every airplane trip.(51)

While there is no clear ruling on this issue, the custom today generally follows the poskim who require the recitation of ha-gomel only when an ocean (or a desert) is crossed. [Once the destination has been reached, ha-gomel is recited; the return leg of the trip necessitates its own ha-gomel.(52)]

**QUESTION:** Is birkas ha-gomel recited in cases other than the four categories mentioned?

**DISCUSSION:**In addition to the four categories of danger mentioned above, our custom is to recite ha-gomel whenever one finds himself in a life-threatening situation and was saved by the grace of Hashem. As long as one came face to face with actual danger and survived, whether he was saved miraculously or by what appears to be "natural" means, ha-gomel is recited. (53) For example,(54) a survivor of

- \* an attack by wild animals who normally kill their prey
- \* a car accident which according to bystanders should have been fatal
- \* a bus which was blown up by a suicide bomber
- \* a shooting attack
- \* an armed robbery
- \* a collapsed building
- \* a soldier who saw combat in war

In the cases mentioned earlier, the person found himself in actual danger and was nevertheless saved. Sometimes, however, a person is merely close to the danger, but was not actually involved in the danger itself. In those cases, birkas ha-gomel is not recited.(55) Some examples are:

- \* a sighting of a wild animal, but the animal did not attack

\* a killer aiming a weapon in one's general direction, but was overpowered

\* a car that went out of control but came to a last minute stop

\* a low-impact head-on car crash

\* a bomb that exploded seconds before people entered that area

\* a gun that discharged by accident and missed the person by inches

**GENERAL NOTE:**

If one remains in doubt as to whether or not he is obligated to recite birkas ha-gomel (e.g., it is difficult to determine if he was in "actual" danger; an unresolved dispute among the poskim; a minyan is not available; a father for a minor, a woman who is embarrassed to recite the blessing in the presence of men, etc.), he has two options whereby he can fulfill his obligation:

\* He can recite the blessing without pronouncing Hashem's name. The text would then be: Baruch atah ha-gomel . . .

\* He can have specific intent to fulfill this mitzvah when reciting the morning blessing of ha-gomel chasadim tovim l'amo Yisrael. Preferably, he should do so out loud in front of ten men, including two Torah scholars. If he wishes, he can add at the end of the text the words "shegemalani (kol tov)."(56)

## FOOTNOTES:

1 Vayikra 7:12 and Rashi and Rashbam.

2 Berachos 54a, based on Tehillim 107. See also Rashi, Zevachim 7a (s.v. lo) and Menachos 79b (s.v. l'achar).

3 Rosh, Berachos 9:3, as explained by Chasam Sofer, O.C. 51 and Avnei Nezer, O.C. 39.

4 Some original texts omit the word kol, an omission approved by Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-7).

5 Sha'arei Efrayim 4:30; Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:5.

6 O.C. 219:2. B'diavad, if the congregation did not respond, one fulfills the mitzvah regardless; Mishnah Berurah 219:5.

7 See Maharam Shick, O.C. 88 and Sdei Chemed, Asifas Dinim, Berachos, 2:10. See Shiras David, Vayikra 7:12 for a possible explanation.

8 Based on Magen Avraham, O.C. 219:1.

9 See Pri Megadim 219:1; Chasam Sofer, O.C. 51 and Minchas Yitzchak 4:11-9.

10 Seder Amiras Korban Todah, published in Chayei Adam following Klal 69 and quoted in part by Mishnah Berurah 218:32.

11 See similar instructions in Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav, O.C. 1:9.

12 O.C. 219:6 and Mishnah Berurah 20.

13 Sha'arei Efrayim 4:27.

14 O.C. 219:3 and Mishnah Berurah 6 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 7. See Tzitz Eliezer 13:18.

15 Mishnah Berurah 219:4.

16 Chasam Sofer, O.C. 51; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:14. Women who recite birkas ha-gomel after childbirth may do so at night l'chatchilah; Tzitz Eliezer 13:17.

17 Based on Mishnah Berurah 8:13, 213:12. See also Rav Akiva Eiger on O.C. 219:5.

18 Chasam Sofer (Sefer ha-Zikaron, pg. 25), quoted in Piskei Teshuvos 219:17.

19 Be'er Heitev 219:9.

20 Mishnah Berurah 219:8.

21 Based on Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:7.

22 O.C. 219:3 and Beur Halachah (s.v. lo).

23 See Mishnah Berurah 219:8

24 See Kaf ha-Chayim 219:3 and 26. See also Beur Halachah 219:3 (s.v. v'yesh omrim).

25 Mishnah Berurah 219:4.

26 O.C. 219:5.

27 Sha'arei Efrayim 4:27 (at least thirteen people); Chayei Adam 65:6 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 61:2 (at least eleven people).

28 Shulchan ha-Tahor 219:2, who therefore recommends waiting until Shabbos, since more people and Torah scholars will be present.

29 Sha'arei Efrayim 4:27 and Chasam Sofer, O.C. 51. See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:14. But since this is only a hiddur mitzvah, he does not have priority over other chiyuvim; Sha'arei Efrayim 2:11 and Beur Halachah 136:1 (s.v. b'Shabbos). See note 51.

30 Eishel Avraham Tanyana 219.

31 Birkei Yosef 219:6, quoting an oral ruling of the Rambam; Sha'arei Efrayim 4:27; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:15; Tzitz Eliezer 13:19-3.

32 See, however, Tzafnas Pa'aneich, Berachos 10:8.

33 An authority as early as the Magen Avraham (219:4) already suggested that a husband recite birkas ha-gomel on behalf of his wife. But besides the fact that this would not solve the problem for girls and unmarried women, Be'ur Halachah (219:4, s.v. v'ain) rejects this option from a halachic point of view, and Aruch ha-Shulchan (219:9) testifies that it never gained acceptance. Mishnah Berurah suggests that a woman recite birkas ha-gomel in front of [ten] women plus one man, but subsequent poskim rejected this solution; see Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:6; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:3; Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:14; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-4).

Harav Y.S. Elyashiv was asked the following question: Mishnah Berurah suggests that a woman who needs to recite birkas ha-gomel should do so in the presence of [nine or] ten women plus one man. While we can understand how ten women can satisfy the requirement that ha-gomel be recited in front of ten people, it is not clearly understood why the Mishnah Berurah recommends that one man be present.

Harav Elyashiv answered that quite possibly, Mishnah Berurah is referring to the halachah quoted in Shulchan Aruch that ha-gomel be recited in the presence of at least two scholars. In several areas of halachah we find the concept that a group of women is considered like one man (see Yevamos 88b and 15a). Thus one additional man will complete the requirement of having two scholars present.

34 Sha'arei Efrayim 4:28; Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:6; Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 91, quoting Chazon Ish and Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-4); B'tzeil ha-Chochmah 6:78; Teshuvos v'Hanaghos 1:195.

35 Be'er Heitev 219:1, quoting Knesses ha-Gedolah; Birkei Yosef 219:2; Chayei Adam 65:6; Ben Ish Chai (Eikev 5); Yechaveh Da'as 4:15.

36 Minchas Shelomo 2:4-31.

37 Eliyahu Rabba 219:5, quoted by Sha'arei Efrayim 4:28 and Minchas Yitzchak 4:11-9.

38 This is the source of the widespread custom that as soon as a yoledeh recovers, she goes to shul to hear and to respond to Barechu es Hashem ha-mevorach. In this case, her husband's aliyah has priority over almost any other chiyuv; Be'ur Halachah 136:1 (s.v. b'Shabbos.)

39 Oral ruling quoted in Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:14.

40 Halichos Shelomo 1:23-8, and note 10.

41 Sha'arei Teshuvah 219:1 and 3 and Mishnah Berurah 219:3. See Har Tzvi, O.C. 113.

42 See Ketzos ha-Shulchan 65:1.

43 See Be'ur Halachah 219:1 (s.v. chavush), Aruch ha-Shulchan 219:5 and Kaf ha-Chayim 219:11.

44 Rama 219:8.

45 See Avnei Nezer, Y.D. 321; Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 91; Halichos Shelomo 1:23-2; Tzitz Eliezer 12:18.

46 See Be'ur Halachah 219:8 (s.v. kegon); Ketzos ha-Shulchan 65:3.

47 Tzitz Eliezer 12:18.

48 Minchas Yitzchak 4:11. Thus, ha-gomel is not recited when taking the ferry from Britain to France.

49 Chelkas Yaakov 2:9, quoting the Belzer Rebbe. This was also the view of the Brisker Rav and Tchebiner Rav, quoted in Teshuvos v'Hanaghos 1:81 and 3:191. See also B'tzeil ha-Chochmah 2:20. According to this opinion, birkas ha-gomel can be said only without pronouncing Hashem's Name.

50 Chazon Ish and Harav Y. Y. Kanievsky (quoted in Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 1, pg. 91); Minchas Yitzchak 2:47; Tzitz Eliezer 11:14.

51 Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:59; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 65:1; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-5); Be'er Moshe 7:69; Yechaveh Da'as 2:26 (for a trip longer than seventy-two minutes).

52 Halichos Shelomo 1:23-4. Others hold that if the duration of the trip is less than three days, then ha-gomel should be recited only upon return; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:5.

53 Mishnah Berurah 219:32. This is the Ashkenazi custom; Sefaradim, however, recite ha-gomel only in situations that fall under one of the four categories mentioned; Kaf ha-Chayim 219:52.

54 The following lists are to be used only as a guide. In actual practice, the case with all of its various details must be presented to a rav for a final ruling.

55 See Maharal (Nesivos Olam, Nesiv ha-Avodah 13), quoted in Shevet ha-Levi 9:45. See also Halichos Shelomo 1:23-1; Chut Shani, Shabbos vol. 2, pg. 302, quoting Harav N. Karelitz; Knei Bosesem 1:12.

56 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:23-8). According to Harav Auerbach, this second method is preferable to the first.

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### Turning Over Sodom and Amora

Rosh Hayeshiva **Rav Mordechai Greenberg** shlita

(Translated by Rav Meir Orlian)

After the flood, G-d said: "I will no longer curse the earth on account of man ... and I will no longer smite every living being as I have done." (Bereishit 8:21) Yet, as a result of the sin of the people of Sodom, G-d destroyed all the cities, the entire plain, and its vegetation.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (109a) tells of the strange laws that were in Sodom, laws that turned justice into the opposite of rightful: A person who owned a bull had to watch all the city's animals for one day, whereas one who had no animals had to watch for two days. A person who crossed the bridge would pay one zuz, whereas one who went around the bridge would pay two zuz. When someone would injure his friend, the injured party would pay the aggressor the salary for bloodletting.

The sefer Be'er Yosef explains that for this reason they were punished with turning over the cities, as retribution for turning over justice. "The four [cities] sat on one stone, and He turned them upside down, as it says, 'G-d stretched out His hand to the flint and overturned mountains from the root.' (Iyov 28:9) (Midrash Rabbah, cited by Rashi.)

But why was the earth turned over? It was because the land caused their sin. Their laws were a way of preventing strangers from coming close to their land, so that others would not benefit from their abundant land.

The Gemara teaches: "The people of Sodom were haughty because of the good that G-d bestowed upon them ... They said: Since [we have] 'a land from which comes bread, and has gold dust,' why do we need passerbys, who come only to take of our wealth? Come and let us erase trespassing from our land." (Sanhedrin 109a) Therefore, they ordained strange laws and established wicked judges to punish anyone who violated them, as the Gemara relates about the young lady who hosted guests. Even though these laws were aimed against foreigners, once they became accustomed to them, this way of life became natural and customary. Because the reason for their sin was so that foreigners should not benefit from their land, their punishment was that their land should become, "sulfur and salt, a conflagration of the entire land" (Devarim 29:22), and no one would again pass through.

This sin was worse than the sin of the generation of the flood. There the sins were of individual people, but in Sodom, the laws were anchored in law. Robbery and theft were the law of the land, and one who dared violate the law was punished. Thus, they were all turned cruel through the education of the state, and therefore they all gathered around the house of Lot, from large to small, because he dared to receive guests in his home. Even though this did not harm them, there was zeal here for the laws of the state. "There was not even one righteous one amongst them." (Rashi)

Thus, corrupt laws can train the people to do bad, and it will become natural for them.

It is told that the GR"A stipulated with the community leaders in Vilna, that they should not bother him with communal issues, unless they wanted to institute new practices in the community. As time went on, many people from all around began coming to collect charity in Vilna, which was a major Jewish city. This reduced the "income" of the poor of Vilna. The community leaders decided to institute a new rule, that the poor of the nearby cities should not be allowed to collect money in Vilna - "the poor of your city come first." According to the agreement between them, the communal leaders presented their new enactment to the GR"A for his approval. The GR"A said in surprise: We agreed that only new rules will be

brought to me. The community leaders said to him: This is s new rule. He answered them: This institution is already recorded in the books of the Va'ad arba artzot. When the gabbaim expressed their surprise that they do not recall such an enactment in the books of the Va'ad arba aratzot, he answered that this is mentioned in the annals of Sodom, Amora, Adma and Tzvoyim.

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**Why Harold Kushner Is Wrong  
by Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner**

Our efforts to reconcile the existence of suffering with our belief in a G-d Who is both omnipotent and benevolent must proceed simultaneously on two planes: one of intellectual understanding and the other of trust. From the outset, we must realize that definitive answers as to why one person suffers in a particular way are closed to us.

We can and will, however, identify reasons why G-d allows suffering. Before doing so, however, we will first examine an alternative approach that has recently gained a great deal of prominence. Analyzing the faults of that approach will help clarify a coherent Jewish response to the problem.

The opposite approach might be termed that of randomness. According to this view, not everything that takes place in the world has a purpose or comes from God. Efforts to reconcile the existence of evil and suffering in the world with God's justice are a waste of time because they proceed from the false premise that everything that takes place in the world comes from G-d and has a purpose.

Harold Kushner, a Conservative rabbi, followed precisely such an approach in his best-selling book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Few "Jewish" books in recent decades have had a greater impact, and Kushner is regularly cited, in both the Jewish and non-Jewish media, as an expert on suffering and a variety of other ethical issues.

Kushner came to the topic of suffering through a terrible tragedy in his family: He and his wife lost a young son to a particularly perverse degenerative disease -- premature aging syndrome. He has thus paid a heavy price for the right to talk about suffering. Though we shall be very critical of Kushner's conclusions, nothing we say should be seen as a personal criticism of him, or an attempt to in any way diminish the awful suffering he had to bear. It would be contemptible to pass judgment on another's experience of a tragedy of such magnitude.

If we are critical of Kushner's ideas, it is only because he has offered his views to the public as a consolation to those in pain and as an authentic Jewish response to the problem of suffering. As we shall see, they are neither.

While Kushner is in some sense a believer in God, his own faith was severely tested by the prolonged agony that he and his wife endured. He felt the need to construct a theory that would reconcile his tragedy with Judaism's belief in God's benevolence.

He concluded that to maintain his belief in G-d he must reject either God's benevolence or His omnipotence. He chose the latter course. God, in Kushner's view, created the world and provides the foundation of moral principle. But He cannot quite control the world He created. He hopes for our good and He sympathizes, as it were, with us in our pain, but He is powerless to do anything about it.

As to why a G-d Who had the power to create the entire universe in the first place would create one that He is powerless to control, Kushner basically shrugs his shoulders and contents himself with noting that the world is relatively good for most people most of the time. We might designate this theory as "randomness plus God."

Unable to understand why a good G-d would allow individuals to suffer, Kushner ends by neatly defining the question away. He cannot even conceive of the possibility of any understanding, and so concludes that we have no answers because there are no answers. Much of what happens is nothing more than random chance. Pain and tragedy are a necessary consequence of a world over which G-d does not exercise complete control.

The first thing that must be noted about this view is that it provides no solace whatsoever. Mrs. Kushner herself is on record as saying that she derived no comfort from her husband's theories. And that is not accidental. What good is it to know that G-d shares my pain if at the same time I am told that pain is utterly without meaning and purpose? Even if I cannot know the exact meaning of my personal suffering, I can still have faith that there is some purpose to that suffering. Kushner, however, denies the possibility of meaning, and with it any possibility of comfort.

There is no comparison between pain that is without purpose and meaning, and that which is purposeful. Childbirth is one of the most intensely painful experiences. Yet

women willingly endure the agony of childbirth because they know that the end result is a child. A woman may not understand why pain must be the price for giving birth, but since it is, she accepts it.

The Jewish view of suffering, as we will learn later, is that it is part of a process of self-development -- in effect a process of birth of the self. Though we would never choose intense suffering for ourselves, faith that it is part of a growth process can take away, if not the pain, at least some of its sting. Knowledge that the suffering has purpose and is leading somewhere offers me the strength to weather the crisis.

But if that suffering has no meaning, I am left all alone, a helpless victim of blind fate or randomness. Hearing that G-d feels my pain and laments my bad luck does not alleviate my sense of victimhood. Indeed, being told that my particular suffering somehow eluded God's notice until it was too late only exacerbates that sense of victimhood.

Compare the case of two laborers who both have their wages taken away. One has the money deducted from his paycheck and deposited in a pension fund. The other is mugged on the street. Both have lost their hard-earned money, but their reactions will be very different. For one the loss is only temporary; he is building for his future. The other, however, is bereft. He is a victim and nothing more. He cannot conceive of his mugging as leading to some future good.

If G-d Himself can find no rhyme or reason for my suffering, if there is no gain from my pain, how am I supposed to feel about it? How can I grow by viewing myself as the victim of chance? Far more than God's sympathy, I seek His assurance that whatever is happening to me is designed to lead somewhere and that I have not simply been abandoned to blind fate.

Kushner does argue that even if our suffering is random, it can be a means of personal growth and a means of deepening our sensitivities. But this is little solace. If G-d Himself judges the gain from our suffering not to be worth the price, how are we expected to feel?

Kushner's vision saps our emotional strength at times of suffering. But its effects go beyond just those instances of personal suffering and affect the entire sense of our place in the cosmos. What value are we supposed to attach to our life if at any moment it can be cut off for no reason whatsoever? Without an answer to that question, Kushner's theory remains an emotional nightmare.

In the end, Kushner's vision fails to even achieve his original purpose: preserving God's benevolence. If G-d cannot prevent suffering, then neither can He direct Creation to bring about good. If He is not responsible for the bad, neither can He be credited with the good. If so, God's benevolence, which is central to both Jewish thought and that of Harold Kushner, is irretrievably lost.

**LIMITING GOD**

Now, of course, because an idea is discomfiting and provides no comfort does not make it untrue. But Kushner's book not only fails to provide any comfort, it also is profoundly un-Jewish. Each of his main arguments runs counter to the traditional Jewish approach to the subject. They reflect accepted modern views far more closely than they do anything written in classical Jewish sources.

Morning and evening, Jews proclaim God's unity in the Shema. The Shema, with its assertion of God's absolute unity, constitutes the basic affirmation of Jewish faith. The Jewish belief in God's unity stands in stark contrast to paganism, based on a pantheon of competing gods, each with its own sphere of influence.

Kushner's view of the world is closer to Persian Manicheism, in which the forces of Good and Evil are in constant struggle, than it is to traditional Judaism. He arrays a benevolent God, on one side, against the forces of randomness on the other. At best, his G-d is nothing more than a superman.

Kushner's G-d is a sovereign with very limited powers. Kushner has basically projected human limitation upon God. We have limits, so G-d has limits. Sometimes we are too busy to attend to all the details in our life, and God, too, sometimes loses track of the details.

All classical Jewish sources reject precisely such anthropomorphic projections of our human failings and limitations to God. The Jewish G-d is transcendental, completely different from us. We are physical beings, and as such subject to limitations. G-d is not a physical entity and knows no limitations. Maimonides describes the qualitative chasm between us and God:

"G-d is not physical and there is absolutely no comparison between Him and any of His creations. His existence is not like their existence; His life is not like that of any living being; His wisdom is not like the wisdom of the wisest of men. The difference between Him and His creations is not merely quantitative, but absolute..."

Any similarity between Maimonides' G-d and Kushner's is purely coincidental. The G-d of Maimonides is the Creator and Source of all being -- the uncreated One Who must exist, has always existed and will always exist. Since He necessitates all being, He can possess neither lack nor limitation.

Kushner's God, by contrast, is nothing more than an intellectual construct designed to save its author's belief in God's benevolence. His G-d is but a bit player in the heavenly hierarchy, playing a limited role in our existence, like the deities of Greek mythology. By arguing that much of what happens is beyond God's control, Kushner

effectively severs the connection between G-d and the world and thereby empties physical existence of all meaning. The events of our lives, as portrayed by Kushner, have no relationship to God.

Removing God, in this fashion, from an active role in the world and our lives is a complete distortion of all Jewish thought and living. Our faith as Jews does not end with an affirmation of belief in God's existence. G-d does not sit, as it were, in isolation in His heaven. Faith, for us, means that we are aware of the Divine Presence in every aspect of our world.

We are required, writes Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in *The Way of God*, to both "believe and know" that there is a God. This statement is hard to understand. If I know that there is a God, then belief is extraneous. The explanation is that knowing does not refer to empirical knowledge. Rather "knowing" refers to a process of relating our faith in G-d to everything we do. Knowing that there is a G-d means that our faith in Him must become inseparable from who we are and how we view the world.

Attaining this level is the work of a lifetime. Most of us are far from reaching it. We walk through life as if in a fog. Our faith remains theoretical at best. When we think about God, we forget the world. And when we think about the world, we forget God. No integration of G-d into our world takes place.

Occasionally, however, events intrude with such force that we are compelled to deal with our faith in the context of what is taking place in our lives. Suffering is one such event. It challenges us to confront the ultimate questions of who we are and what is the significance of our lives. Suffering is a painful invitation to deepen our faith and make it a real part of our lives.

But that can only be done if we first recognize the physical world as God's creation and as an ongoing expression of His Will, which exists only as a medium for us to relate to God. By denying God's control over the events of our lives, however, Kushner denies meaning to those events and any possibility of using them to deepen our relationship with God.

In the face of acute suffering, he would strengthen the chasm between G-d and the world, and thus ensures that G-d remains irrelevant to our lives -- an intellectual concept to be retrieved intermittently. He thus denies us any possibility of solace through a deepened relationship with God.

Having seen why a philosophy of randomness undermines rather than strengthens our faith in moments of crisis, let us now examine the traditional Jewish view, which is the very antithesis of Kushner's: the belief that everything that happens in the world has a purpose. [Part Two will appear next week.]

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