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ON **VAYIERA** - 5778

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subject: Weekly Parsha from **Rabbi Berel Wein**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**  
**VAYERA**

There are many angels that walk amongst us in this world, unrecognized by others. Angels apparently adopt the coloration of the society into which their mission has taken them. The prophets of Israel describe in vivid detail the description of angels as they appear in heaven's court. They have wings and many-faceted eyes. They are fiery and swift, fearsome and relentless. But when they are on earth, so to speak, they appear as ordinary members of the society that surrounds them.

That is why in some of the narratives described for us in the Bible they are not immediately recognized as angels. This happens in the case of Yehoshua and with the mother of Shimshon. In this week's Torah reading, the three angels originally appear as wayfarers, wandering nomads, walking in the midday heat. Only when they enter into the environment of holiness that marked the dwelling place of Avraham and Sarah is their true nature and accurate identity revealed.

Some creatures could enter that tent as Bedouin Arabs and emerge as angels of God. In the environment of Avraham and Sarah, what Abraham Lincoln famously called "the better angels within us" emerged and became dominant. It was this ability to truly identify and draw forth the goodness inherent in humankind that made this couple the ancestors of human civilization in its most positive form.

Civilization is the story of human transformation. The many generations from Kayin the killer, to Avraham, the benefactor of all, is the story of this uphill climb in the saga of human development.

Our ancestors transformed the world. They exposed the falsehoods and superstitions of paganism and idolatry. They established monotheism as the common norm of faith and eternal belief. They reconnected human beings with their Creator. And they taught all later generations to search for and identify with the angels that the Lord constantly sends to walk amongst us.

By searching for angels we come to respect others and open ourselves to the task of helping our fellow human beings. They taught us that human hospitality is a greater form of Godly service than meditating in the hope of being in God's presence, so to speak. They inculcated within us the spirit of compassion and goodness that lies at the heart of Jewish values and life. They taught us to believe in angels no matter how devilish a world we are living in. The amazing survival of the Jewish people over the ages of persecution and discrimination is a triumph not only of will but of attitude. We always believed that tomorrow could and would be better than today and that we would yet walk amongst angels here on earth. Even in a world dominated by the lifestyle of Sodom, Avraham sought to transform the evildoers rather than destroy them completely. He was always looking for angels. Sometimes that quest was fruitless and God's judgment naturally prevailed. But the greatness of Avraham was in the search and quest itself.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

**Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a**

*Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:*

Preparing Oneself for Difficulties

Q: Is there a proper way to prepare oneself for difficulties which Hashem brings upon a person?

A: The proper way is to always see the good, to see that the majority of one's life and the majority of the world is good (Moreh Nevuchim 3:12), and to know that the difficulties are for the good (Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 19).

Paying Taxes for Pidyon Ha-Ben

Q: I am a Cohain and received money at a Pidyon Ha-Ben. Do I have to declare it as income for tax purposes?

A: No. It is a minimal amount of money, a rare occurrence and is considered a gift (Similarly, Shut Revivot Ephraim 6:389 brings from the Sefer U-Vacharta Ba-Chaim p. 68 that Ha-Rav Chaim Kreiswirth, Av Beit Din of Antwerp, said in his eulogy for Ha-Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky, Rosh Yeshivat Torah Ve-Da'at, that he would pay taxes on the Mishloach Manot he received. This, however, is an act of piety and not an obligation, since the amount one receives of Mishloach Manot is negligent).

Zionism

Q: How do we know that the Zionist Rabbis are correct and not the Charedim?

A: This was a major question when the movement to return to Zion began, since there were many opposing factors. But now that we see the building of Eretz Yisrael, the ingathering of the Exiles, the establishment of the State of Israel, the military victories, the unity of the Nation and the incredible Torah community in Israel, it has become clear. In Eretz Yisrael there is great physical and spiritual success, while in the Exile there is great physical and spiritual destruction (See Nefesh Ha-Rav pp.87-88).

Language of Maran Ha-Rav Kook

Q: What language did Maran Ha-Rav Kook speak – Yiddish or Hebrew?

A: I believe that he spoke Yiddish to those who did not understand Hebrew. Otherwise, he spoke Hebrew with an Ashkenazi pronunciation. See Le-Shelosh Be-Elul. When Rav Kook was unable to return to Eretz Yisrael during the First World War, he served temporarily as Rabbi in England. In order to learn English, he read the Soncino translation of the Tanach. As a result, when he spoke English, people said he spoke like a prophet...  
Texting While Driving

Q: I am riding in a car while my Rav is texting while driving. Is it permissible for me to point out to him that it is forbidden?

A: Ask him directly. In fact, 20% of fatal car accidents are a result of texting while driving (see Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 242:22).

Problematic Book

Q: Is it permissible to read a good book which contains a few problematic parts?

A: It is similar to eating Kosher soup with a few pieces of non-Kosher meat in it.

Crib Death

Q: It is true what they say that crib death is on account of disputes among Am Yisrael?

A: 1. No one knows the secrets of Hashem. 2. Disputes are certainly a bad thing and one should resolve them.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU

www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

**The Space Between Us (Vayera 5778)**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

The stories told in Bereishit chapters 21 and 22 – the sending away of Ishmael and the binding of Isaac – are among the hardest to understand in the whole of Tanakh. Both involve actions that strike us as almost unbearably harsh. But the difficulties they present go deeper even than that. Recall that Abraham was chosen “so that he would instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” He was chosen to be a father. The first two letters of his name, Av, mean just that. Avram means “a mighty father.” Avraham, says the Torah, means “a father of many nations.”

Abraham was chosen to be a parental role model. But how can a man who banished his son Ishmael, sending him off with his mother Hagar into the desert, where they nearly died, be thought of as an exemplary father? And how could a man who was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac be a model for future generations?

These are not questions about Abraham. They are questions about the will of God. For it was not Abraham who wanted to send Ishmael away. To the contrary, it “distressed Abraham greatly,” because Ishmael was his son (Gen. 21:11). It was God who told him to listen to Sarah and send the child away. Nor was it Abraham who wanted to sacrifice Isaac. It was God who told him to do so, referring to Isaac as “your son, your only one, the one you love” (Gen. 22:2). Abraham was acting on both occasions against his emotions, his paternal instincts. What is the Torah telling us about the nature of fatherhood? It seems very difficult indeed to draw a positive message from these events.

There is an even deeper problem, and it is hinted at in the words God spoke to Abraham in summoning him to the binding of his son: “Take your son, your only son, the one you love—Isaac—and go [lekh lekha] to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” These words inevitably remind us of God’s first summons: “Go forth [lekh lekha] from your land, your birthplace and your father’s house” (Gen. 12:1). These are the only two places in which this phrase occurs in the Torah. Abraham’s last trial echoed his first.

But note that the first trial meant that Abraham had to abandon his father, thereby looking as if he were neglecting his duties as a son.[1] So, whether as a father to his sons or as a son to his father, Abraham was commanded to act in ways that seem the exact opposite of what we would expect and how we should behave.

This is too strange to be accidental. There is a mystery here to be decoded.

The barrier to our understanding of these events lies in the sheer abyss of time between then and now. Abraham, as the pioneer of a new kind of faith and way of life, was instituting a new form of relationship between the generations. Essentially, what we are seeing in these events is the birth of the individual.

In ancient times, and in antiquity in Greece and Rome, the basic social unit was not the individual but the family. Religious rituals were performed around the fire in the family hearth, with the father serving as priest, offering sacrifices, libations and incantations to the spirits of dead ancestors. The power of the father was absolute. Wives and children had no rights and no independent legal personalities. They were mere property and could be killed by the head of the household at will. Each family had its own gods, and the father was the sole intermediary with the ancestral spirits, whom he would one day join. There were no individuals in the modern sense. There were only families, under the absolute rule of its male head.

The Torah was a radical break with this entire mindset. The anthropologist Mary Douglas points out that the Torah was unique in the ancient world in making no provision for sacrifices to dead ancestors, and forbidding the attempt to communicate with the spirits of the dead.[2]

Monotheism was more than simply the belief in one God. Because each human was in His image, and because each could be in direct relationship with Him, the individual was suddenly given significance – not just fathers but also mothers, and not just parents but also children. No longer were they fused into a single unit, with a single controlling will. They were each to become persons in their own right, with their own identity and integrity.[3] Such changes do not happen overnight, and they do not happen without wrenching dislocations. That is what is happening at both ends of the Abraham story. At the beginning of his mission, Abraham was told to separate himself from his father, and towards the end he was told to separate himself, in different ways, from each of his two sons. These painful episodes represent the agonising birth-pangs of a new way of thinking about humanity.

First separate, then connect. That seems to be the Jewish way. That is how God created the universe, by first separating domains – day and night, upper and lower waters, sea and dry land – then allowing them to be filled. And that is how we create real personal relationships. By separating and leaving space for the other. Parents should not seek to control children. Spouses should not seek to control one another. It is the carefully calibrated distance between us in which relationship allows each party to grow.

In his recent book on sporting heroes, *The Greatest*, Matthew Syed notes how important the encouragement of parents is to the making of champions, but he adds:

Letting go – that is the essential paradox of parenthood. You care, you nurture, you sacrifice, and then you watch as the little ones fly into the great unknown, often shouting recriminations as they depart. You will experience the stomach clenching pain of separation, but you do so with a smile and a hug, aware that the desire to protect and love must never morph into the tyranny of mollycoddling.[4]

It is this drama of separation that Abraham symbolically enacts in his relationship both to his father and to his two sons. In this world-transforming moment of the birth of the individual, God is teaching him the delicate art of making space, without which no true individuality can grow.

In the lovely words of Irish poet John O’Donohue our challenge is: “To bless the space between us.”[5]

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from: **Avi Zelefsky** <avizelefsky@gmail.com>

date: Thu, Nov 24, 2016 at 6:29 AM

subject: Parshas Vayeira – Based on shiur by **Rav Bezalel Rudinsky**

This week’s parsha begins with Hashem visiting Avraham avinu. Chazal in *Medresh Rabbah* explain that this communication with Hashem was a new revelation to Avraham - it was something he never had before. Avraham himself even said: “Hashem didn’t come to me before my bris.”

There is a blaring question standing out right in front of us: Avraham, with all of his greatness and chashivus, is only fit to have divine revelation now? How can that be? Avraham answered the question - it was through his bris that he was now zoche to Hashro'as Hashchino. But what changed?

So we just came to the conclusion that this was the first revelation Avraham received. Suddenly, Avraham notices three guests and he rushes to bring them into his home. The gemarah in shabbos says that we see from here that accepting guests is bigger than divine revelation.

What does that even mean? This was Avraham avinu's first revelation! This was a big event! How can we even say that accepting guests is bigger than divine revelation?

R' Eliyashiv zt"l, said that Avraham avinu was so into his guests that he even planted a tree for them to sit under. We see from the fact that he himself planted the tree that he wanted every part of the mitzvah of hachnosas orchim - even the preparation to the mitzvah.

Why did Avraham do so much? What is so great about hachnosas orchim? The gemarah in sanhedrin says that Hashem told Avraham - please do this last test of the akeida. If you do this, great. And if not, than all of the tests that you already took are no big deal.

No big deal? The tests he took were very challenging!

Additionally, why was Akeidas Yitzchak only a test for Avraham and not Yitzchak?

Many answer that it is easier to give up one's own life than one's son's life. Every father would sacrifice his life for his son.

Okay, even assuming that, so why not say that it is also a test for Avraham? We mention nothing about Yitzchak! Why not?

There was a very famous conversation between Rabbi Akiva and Tarufus harasha. Tarufus asked Rabbi Akiva: "What's better - the creations of Hashem, or the creations of man?" Rabbi Akiva answered: "the creations of man." Tarufus then asked: "Why did God make it than man circumcises his son? Why didn't he create them perfectly?" Rabbi Akiva turned to his talmidim smiling and said "I knew this was coming." Rabbi Akiva then took a bucket of kernels and some pastries. He asked Tarufus: "which is better - the kernels, or the pastries? The pastries. The kernels were created by Hashem. The pastries were created by man.

What's going on?

Hashem in this week was standing over Avraham avinu when He was visiting him (as implied from the lashon of Avraham sitting). Hashem told Avraham that this was a simin for the future: Hashem would also be standing when beis din is sitting.

We see that Hashem was lowering Himself, kavayochol, for Avraham. Why?

The parsha says that in his preparation of the akeida, Avraham saddled his own donkey. It also says by Moshe rabbeinu that he took the donkey down to mitzrayim. Rashi says that this was the donkey that Avraham used to travel to the akeida, and this is going to be the donkey moshiach will ride on. The ba'al akeida asks: There is a gemarah in sanhedrin that says that moshiach will come "riding in the clouds" if we are zoche to his arrival, and he will come on a donkey if we are not zoche. So what's the p'shat here? Are we for sure not going to be zoche? Chas V'shalom!

When Avraham went to do the akeida, he needed to muster all of his ruchnius and abandon his gashmiyus. This was due to the fact that he was naturally a man of kindness - the akeida was forcing him to go against every bit of nature in his body, so Avraham needed to conquer his complete physical body to do the will of Hashem. This was a huge challenge for Avraham, because he was a man of kindness. Yitzchak was a man of gevurah and tefillah - this wasn't a test for him. That is why we call akeidas Yitzchak a challenge only to Avraham.

When Moshe was asked to be a leader and king of klal yisroel, every fiber in his body felt that the position should be given to Aharon. Moshe therefore needed to take this donkey, which represented overcoming of nature. This also explains moshiach - he will come with the donkey regardless if we are

zoche or not. Moshiach will come with the physical donkey if we are not zoche, but if we are zoche, he will come with the representation of the donkey - going against nature - due to the result of his arrival through our conquering of our temptation to do evil.

What is the whole idea behind a bris? To always do Hashem's will, even if it means physically changing who we are.

When Hashem comes down to Earth, shamayim needs to open itself up (and lower itself) to Earth. But that can only happen if Earth is greater than Shamayim. Malachim are perfect - they don't need any change. But when Avraham did the bris milah, he modified himself. That was greater than shamayim - that is why Hashem was able to come down to Avraham, and that also explains this new "divine revelation" that Avraham received.

Hashem said: "I came down and I am standing because Avraham modified himself." And Hashem will also stand when his children are in Beis din, as Beis din represents modification."

This is what Rabbi Akiva was telling Tarufus - Hashem wants us to change who we are. That is why he created us imperfectly, because He wants us to change.

What is kindness? It is me doing for you. Hachnosas orchim means - my life needs to work around yours. This is the bris milah of hachnosas orchim - going against the norm, which is prioritizing oneself, and instead serving others first. Avraham was the master of kindness. This explains why he had a door for each side of the house - guests should have easy access of entering his house.

This doesn't only apply to Avraham; it applies to us as well. Although we might not be on the level of sacrificing our son, we are able to conquer our temptation to go against Hashem's will. And every time we do, it is an extension of the mitzvah of bris milah.

May we all live up to this essential mitzvah.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorahstone@otsny.org>

reply-to: yishai@ots.org.il

subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

**Parshat Vayera (Genesis 18:1-22:24)**

**Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel — "And it came to pass...that God tested Abraham, saying to him, 'Abraham,' to which he responded, 'Here I am!' And He said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, offering him there as a sacrifice on one of the mountains that I will show you' [Gen. 22:1-2].

Has Abraham lost his moral compass? When God presents Abraham with the most difficult and tragic command to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, Abraham rises early the next morning, loads his donkey, calls his servants and immediately starts the journey—without a word of protest.

Not long before, though, when God declares the imminent destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham passionately protests the Divine decree, pleading for the lives of their immoral inhabitants: "Far be it from You to do a thing such as this, to put to death the righteous with the wicked so that the righteous should be like the wicked. Far be it from You! Will the Judge of the entire earth not perform justice?" [ibid. 18:25].

If Abraham was willing to defend the wicked residents of Sodom and Gomorrah from a mass death, could he not have done at least as much for his righteous, beloved and Divinely-promised son? What has changed within Abraham?

Indeed, Abraham has undergone a change, and it is because of this change that he does not argue with God now. Abraham relates to God differently from how he related to Him before. He now has a more distant relationship with God that does not permit the camaraderie of questioning a Divine order. Why is this? At first glance, this would appear to be a negative development. How could distance from God be positive? Paradoxically, in the case of Abraham, it was a necessary evolution. Permit to me explain why.

Fear of God and love of God are two fundamental principles of Jewish philosophy, forming the framework for our service to the Almighty. The former emanates from a sense of healthy distance from God, while the latter involves a sense of closeness to Him. Both relationships are necessary, and complement each other.

Fear of God is critical to the fabric of human existence. Those who love—either God or another human being—may sometimes rationalize away their own lapses and indiscretions with the sense that the beloved will understand, that those in love ‘need not say they are sorry.’ In contrast, fear of God brooks no exceptions, keeping us honest, constantly spurring us on to remain steady and steadfast despite the narrowness of life’s very narrow bridge.

Abraham is the paradigmatic example of loving God. He leaves the comforts of his homeland, birthplace and family and enters an unfamiliar land in order to be with God—much as a lover following his beloved.

Abraham establishes altar after altar in the name of his beloved God, about Whose ethical teachings and powers of creativity he never ceases to speak—and attempts to persuade others to accept Him. He is close to God and he understands God. Hence, his argument with the Divine on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This changes when Abraham sojourns to the Land of Gerar, a place about which he comments, “Surely the fear of God is not in this place” [ibid. 20:11]. The final words we read before the account of the Akeda is that Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines for many days. Indeed, the very introduction to the Akeda story begins: “After these things...” [ibid. 22:1], a reference to his stay in Gerar. What was he doing in a place defined by its lack of fear of God?

This, in fact, is the basis for the segue to the incident of the Akeda, which bespeaks Abraham’s fear of God and his unquestioning acceptance of a Divine command he could not possibly understand. His experience in Gerar had apparently caused him to place an emphasis on a fear of God that he had not previously had to employ to such an extent in his service of God. And it had a balancing effect on him.

We can now see the significance of the climactic moment of the Akeda, when, as Abraham lifts the slaughtering knife, the angel of God cries out, “Do not harm the boy! For now I know that you fear God...” [ibid., v. 12]. In other words, ‘You had long shown your love of God. Now your fear of God has been tested, as well, and you have succeeded!’

It is at this crucial moment that a circle has been completed, an event that began in the land of Gerar and ends on the mount of Moriah. It was in Gerar that Abraham honed his fear of God, a necessity in a culture in which it was sorely lacking.

Whereas Abraham’s first commandment to go to the Land of Israel epitomizes the love of God, this final commandment, the Akeda, most accurately embodies the fear of God. In the process of his life experiences, Abraham has found the proper balance of both religious dynamics, perfecting his relationship with the Almighty, and teaching his descendants the proper path for our service of God.

Shabbat Shalom

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From: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com>

Thu, Nov 2, 2017 at 10:21 PM

**Rabbi Reisman - Parshas Vayeira 5778**

1 - Topic - A thought on Bikur Cholim

As we prepare for Shabbos Parshas Vayeira. A few thoughts on the Parsha beginning with the very first Posuk. The Parsha begins 18:1 ( וַיָּרֵא אֱלֹהֵי יִרְרָה , ) וַיָּרֵא אֱלֹהֵי יִרְרָה (בְּאֶלְפֵי מַקְרָא; וְהוּא יֵשֵׁב פְּתַח-הַקְּאֵהָל, קִהָם הַיּוֹם come? Rashi says Levakeir Es Hacholeh - for Bikur Cholim. Freigt Rav Moshe in the second volume of Darash Moshe (page # 8), the Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim the way it says in Shulchan Aruch, is to visit the Choleh, L'hispalleil Ba'avuro - to Daven for him and L'ayein Bitzrachav - to look and examine what he needs. Bikur Cholim is to do these two things. When you

visit someone you need to Vintch Him Un with a Tefilla and you have to try to see if you can help him in any practical way.

Freigt Rav Moshe, if that is how the Shulchan Aruch Teitches up Bikur Cholim then Lechora it is not Shayich for the Ribbono Shel Olam. What is Shayich by the Ribbono Shel Olam that He came to Avraham to be Mispaleil Ba'avuro? What is Shayich that He came L'ayin Bitzrochov. The Ribbono Shel Olam is the one who takes care of the Tzerachim of everybody. This is Rav Moshe's Kasha.

From this Kasha it is a Raya to a Yesod in the understanding of Bikur Cholim. Although the Shulchan Aruch says that Bikur Cholim is when you visit the Choleh L'ayin Bitzrochov and to be Mispaleil Ba'avuro, it is not for the Toeles of taking care of his Tzerachim. L'ayin Bitzrochov, when you go to the Choleh to see what he needs, it is not for the purpose of taking care of the things that he needs, it is for the purpose of showing him that you care, it is for the empathy, the feeling, the Chavershaf. When you are M'ayin Bitzrochov it is a method by which you make him feel better.

If L'ayin Bitzrochov is to take care of him, if Mispaleil Ba'avuro is so that the Tefilla should be answered, if that is the only Teitch, so then it is Takeh not Shayich by the Borei Olam. However, if we understand that L'ayin Bitzrochov and Mispaleil Ba'avuro is to give him the feeling that there is somebody who cares about him, there is someone who with him, then Farkert by the Borei Olam it is more Shayich then by anything else.

A Nafka Mina is what happens if you have a Choleh and you know that all of his Tzerachim are taken care of, you know that he is well taken care of. Is there still a Mitzvah to be Mevakeir Choleh if the whole thing is L'ayin Bitzrochov?

The answer is yes because it is the feeling and Hergish that you give him. Not the practical part of taking care of the Choleh's Tzerachim. So it is a beautiful Iyun, and a Hesber in the idea of Bikur Cholim.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

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subject: Torah Weekly

**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayera**

**For the week ending 4 November 2017 / 15 Heshvan 5778**

**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com**

**Insights**

**Make Yourself at Home!**

*"And behold! Three men were standing over him!" (18:2)*

There are some people who look like they are giving but they're really taking. And there are some people who look like they are taking when they're really giving.

Anyone who buys a \$5,000-a-plate charity dinner is giving a lot of charity, but he's also getting a lot of status mixed in with his sushi.

On the other hand, there are people who look like they're takers but they are really giving.

Once there was a Jewish traveling salesman who found himself in a largely non-Jewish town on a Friday afternoon. His business had delayed him way beyond his expectations, and there was now no way he could get home for Shabbat. He had heard that there was just one Orthodox family in town where he could spend Shabbat, and as the sun was starting to set he made his way there.

The owner of the house opened the door to him and showed him into the living room. "May I stay here for Shabbat?" asked the traveling salesman. "If you like," replied the host. "The price is \$200." "\$200!" exclaimed the traveling salesman. "That's more than a first-class hotel!" "Suit yourself," replied the host.

Realizing that he had no option, the salesman reluctantly agreed. In the short time left before Shabbat the host showed the salesman his room, the kitchen and the other facilities for his Shabbat stay.

As soon as the host left the room the salesman sat down and thought to himself: "Well, if this is going to cost me \$200, I'm going to get my money's worth." During the entire Shabbat he availed himself unstintingly of the house's considerable facilities. He helped himself to the delicious food in the fridge. He had a long luxurious shower both before and after Shabbat. He really made himself "at home".

After Shabbat, when he had showered and packed, he made his way downstairs and plunked two crisp \$100 bills down on the table in front of his host.

"What's this?" inquired the host. "That's the money I owe you," replied the salesman. "You don't owe me anything. Do you really think I would take money from a fellow Jew for the mitzvah of hospitality?" "But you told me that Shabbat here costs \$200!"

"I only told you that to be sure that you would make yourself at home."

When a guest comes to your home, his natural feeling is one of embarrassment. No one likes being a taker. When a guest brings a present the worst thing you can say is "You shouldn't have done that!" Rather, take the bottle of wine (or whatever it is), open it up and put it in the middle of the table and say, "Thank you so much!" By allowing him to contribute to the meal you will mitigate his feeling of being a taker and you will have done the mitzvah of hospitality to a higher degree.

The mitzvah of hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. We learn this from the beginning of this week's Torah portion. G-d had come to visit Avraham on the third day after his brit milah, the most painful day. G-d made the day extremely hot so that Avraham should not be bothered by guests. When G-d saw that Avraham was experiencing more pain from his inability to do the mitzvah of hospitality than the pain of the brit milah, He sent three angels who appeared as men so that Avraham could do the mitzvah of hospitality. When these "men" appeared, Avraham got up from in front of the Divine Presence to greet his guests.

Hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence.

Sources: *Rashi, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler and others*

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**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

**Outsiders**

A very old minhag is recorded in Shulchan Aruch[1] that when a young woman gets married the chupah should take place outside under the stars. Hakodosh Boruch Hu told Avraham Avinu, look at the stars, try to count them, it is impossible, so too, will your descendants be so numerous like the stars in the sky. We want to invoke the blessing that Hashem gave to Avraham Avinu and the Jewish people, that the young woman who is getting married now should be blessed with a lot of children.

Some commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch assume that this minhag existed already in the days of the Talmud Yerushalmi. Tosfos[2] quotes the Talmud Yerushalmi as distinguishing between the chupah of a woman getting married for the first time as opposed to an almonah: standing under the canopy only constitutes nissuin when the woman is getting married for the first time but not if she is an almonah.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner[3] argued that this makes no sense whatsoever; why should we distinguish between a first marriage and a second marriage? Some of the contemporaries of Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that the idea behind the distinction in the Yerushalmi is not so much first marriage vs. second marriage; but rather that a young woman gets married outside, and the chupah which has four poles constructed in the shape of a tzuras

ha'pesach (i.e. what we use to make an eruv for Shabbos purposes), only constitutes a separate room when it is out in the open. But in the case of the older almonah, who is beyond the child bearing age, who gets married inside, because we are not interested in invoking the blessing of "ko yihiye zaracho", the four poles of the chupah do not accomplish that that area should be considered a separate room because the room is surrounded all around with walls which enclose the entire area, including the chupah area, and everything is considered one big room. (The whole idea that standing the under chupah accomplishes nissuin is based on the premise that the chosson and kallah who are married already enter together in a separate room for the sake of accomplishing nissuin).

When Hashem told Avraham Avinu to gaze up at the stars and attempt to count them, the Torah tells us that he was inside his tent and Hashem took him outside to look at the stars. Rashi in his commentary on chumash quotes from the midrash that the idea behind taking him outside was to demonstrate that the Jewish people are not part of the natural order of the world. The Torah tells us that Sara Imeinu was an akorah, and the gemorah tells us that Avraham Avinu as an akor[4]. According to the rules of nature they should not have been able to have children. According to the rules of nature, the entire Jewish people should not have existed. The entire history of the Jewish people is l'maaleh min ha'tevah. This is what the gemorah[5] means by the statement "ein mazel l'Yisroel". It does not mean that Jewish people have no luck, rather it means that our history is not subject to sh'litas ha'kochavim u'mazolos and does not follow the normal rules and regulations of history. One might refer to this concept as "austritt". Hashem told Avraham Avinu to go out of his house, representing the idea that the Jewish people don't really blend in with the rest of nature.

The old minhag of having the chupah under the stars for a young woman getting married is not really being fulfilled if they stand inside the building and open up the ceiling. Even though they are standing under the stars, but they have not walked outside. If the chupah takes place inside the building with just the ceiling removed, according to the interpretation that we quoted in the Talmud Yerushalmi, such a chupah would not be valid. To properly observe the minhag, the chosson and kallah should go out of the building and there, outdoors, stand under the stars.

This idea could perhaps explain the mysterious phenomenon of anti-Semitism throughout all the ages. The Jewish people really don't blend in with the rest of nature. We know that there is a natural tendency for the human body to reject foreign matter. Because the Jewish people have been designated by Hashem as something "chutz min ha'tevah", and perhaps that is why Avraham Avinu refers to himself as ger v'toshav a'nochi l'mochem[6], the Jews are always considered like geirim, strangers, and correctly so, and this perhaps is the cause of the natural tendency for them to be isolated.[7]

[1] אַבְרָהָם אַבִּינֵנוּ אָמַר לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבֹתָנוּ אָמְרוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבֹתָנוּ אָמְרוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

[2] תוֹסֵפֹת יוֹמָא (יג:.) זָה לַחֲדָא

[3] (ספר כתר ראש (סי' צה). ועי' בספר עקבי הצאן (עמוד 265-266)

[4] (עי' יבמות (טז)

[5] (שבח) קלנו

[6] (בפ' חיי שרה (בראשית ז-ד)

[7] See *The Meaning of Am Hanivchar; the Source of Anti-Semitism*

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

**OU Torah**

**Vayera: Dystopia**

**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

I never thought that I would begin a discussion of the weekly Torah portion by referring to a person who was canonized as a saint by the Catholic

Church. Never, that is, until I sat down to write this week's Person in the Parsha column.

The person in question is Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), the great jurist and counselor to the notorious King Henry VIII, who was beheaded because of his insistence that the Catholic Church was his supreme religious authority, and not King Henry.

I have long admired Sir Thomas because of his courage and also because of his wisdom. One example of the latter is the following quotation, which remains one of my all-time favorites: "The ordinary arts we practice every day at home are of more importance to the soul than their simplicity might suggest."

Although those words of wisdom could themselves serve as the basis for an essay, it is another one of More's contributions to the world's culture that prompts me to begin this column by mentioning him. More earned a prominent place in the history of world literature because of his classic work, *Utopia*. In this work, More imagines the ideal society, one that is perfectly just and fair. Indeed, More coined the word "utopia," which has become part of our everyday parlance.

Centuries after More's martyrdom, at least two of his countrymen found it necessary to seek a word which would signify a perfectly evil society. They searched for an antonym to "utopia." In the early 19th century, Jeremy Bentham introduced the word "cacotopia," defining it as a nightmare society in which morals mean nothing. Bentham's follower, the philosopher John Stuart Mill, preferred the term "dystopia." It is Mills' term that has prevailed as the antonym of choice for "utopia." Subsequent philosophers have found it ironic that this nightmare world often results from attempts to create an ideal society.

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayera (Genesis 18:1-22:24) tells the story of what was the world's first "dystopia," Sodom. We first encounter this "nightmare society" in last week's parsha, Parshat Lech Lecha. There, we read of Lot's decision to leave his Uncle Abram's company and "pitch his tents near Sodom." Immediately, the Torah interjects: "Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked and sinful against the Lord."

(Genesis 13:13) The careful reader of this phrase wonders, "What exactly did they do to deserve such a malignant biblical review? What behaviors were so wicked and sinful?"

The rabbinic commentators, from the Talmud and Midrash down to our very own times, expand upon this description of Sodom and fill in some of the details for us. Rashi briefly summarizes some of the Talmud's views: "They were wicked with their bodies, sinful with their material possessions, and were intentionally rebellious against God." They violated sexual mores, were unethical in their business dealings, and based their behavior upon a corrupt theology.

The great medieval commentator, Rabbenu Bachya ben Asher, elaborates even further by referring to a passage in the Book of Ezekiel that provides us with some further background as to the nature of Sodom. The passage reads: "Behold, this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy. In their haughtiness, they committed abominations before Me; and so I removed them, as you saw." (Ezekiel 16:49-50) The prophet informs us that Sodom was an affluent society which could easily have been charitable to others; yet they enacted laws against charity. They were untroubled, at peace because of their military power, yet they isolated themselves from less fortunate neighboring societies. They committed moral abominations.

Rabbenu Bachya continues, "Although the Torah had not yet been revealed, simple human reason demands charitable deeds and moral behavior. It is despicable that one human would stand idly by as another human suffers from hunger. How can one who has been blessed with bountiful wealth not alleviate another person's poverty? How much more despicable is he who ignores one of his own people, one who dwells within his own community."

Our Sages assert that Sodom and the three cities that were her cohorts were denied a place in the World to Come. It was not because they were a lawless society that they deserved this extreme punishment. Quite the contrary—they had an elaborate legal and judicial system. But their laws were based upon intolerance, selfishness, and cruelty. Our Sages tell us that their laws were enforced by means of the most sadistic tortures imaginable.

Abraham's *weltanschauung* was the polar opposite of Sodom's. Is it not astounding, then, that he pleaded with the Almighty for Sodom's salvation? After all, if the antonym for utopia is dystopia, then Abrahamism is the antonym for Sodomism. Yet Abraham prayed for Sodom!

Commentators throughout the ages have sought to understand why Abraham supposed that there might be fifty, or even ten, righteous men in such a thoroughly corrupt society. One approach to this problem is attributed to Rabbi Isaiah Jungreis, author of the work *Chazon Yeshayahu*, a profound and original thinker whose life was snuffed out by the Nazis in 1944. He argues that, paradoxically, the comprehensiveness and totality of Sodom's evil was precisely what Abraham used in its defense. He puts these words into Abraham's mouth: "Almighty Lord! Is it not conceivable that there are indeed fifty individuals in Sodom who recognize the cruel and evil nature of their society but who cannot protest, because their own lives would then be in danger? Surely these well-intentioned but impotent individuals deserve to be considered righteous individuals in whose merit all of Sodom should be saved!"

Rabbi Jungreis suggests that the Almighty's responded as follows: "Yes, dear Abraham. He who opposes evil but does not protest because he fears for his own life is a righteous person. But there were not fifty, nor even ten, individuals in all of Sodom with troubled consciences. It was not the coercive nature of their environment that prevented them from speaking out. It was their evil and sinful behavior."

I am not qualified to debate Rabbi Jungreis, a keen student of biblical texts and a *kadosh*, a martyr, of the Holocaust. I concur with his hypothesis regarding Abraham's argument. Abraham may very well have argued that those who fail to protest in order to protect their own lives should be considered righteous men.

But I take issue with his conjecture regarding the Almighty's response. I find the following Divine response more likely: "Abraham, dear Abraham! A person who finds himself in an evil society must voice protest, whatever the cost, if he is to be considered righteous. There may very well have been ten, or fifty, or perhaps even more, residents of Sodom who were aware that theirs was a morally corrupt environment. Arguably, those men should not be considered evil. But there is no way that they can be considered righteous. A righteous person speaks out courageously against the evil that surrounds him. Trust me, Abraham, had anyone in Sodom broken the conspiracy of silence which allowed evil to persist, I, the Lord Almighty would have hastened to assist him in his cause."

It was not only Sodom's evil that God could not tolerate. It was also the silence in the face of that evil. And that silence ultimately excluded all of Sodom from the World to Come.

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from: Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald <ezbuchwald@njop.org>

date: Mon, Oct 30, 2017 at 5:57 PM

subject: Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald  
*njop.org*

*Vayeira 5778-2017*

**"The Alliance with Abimelech"**

**Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald**

This week's parasha, parashat Vayeira, is a rich parasha containing many important topics, including the destruction of Sodom, the birth of Isaac and the Akeida—the near death of Isaac and his rescue. One of the fascinating "side" topics found in Genesis 21:22-34 is the alliance and covenant that Abraham concludes with the Philistine king of Gerar, Abimelech.

In Genesis 20, after the destruction of Sodom, Abraham moves south and settles in Gerar, where Abimelech is king. Abimelech abducts Sarah, but G-d prevents him from harming her. As long as Sarah is held captive, the royal family and the people of Gerar are stricken in their bodily organs, unable to relieve themselves or give birth. Only after Abraham prays for them, are they healed.

Rashi on Genesis 25:19, citing the Midrash, notes that the birth of Isaac occurred only after the abduction of Sarah. Rumors spread that Abimelech was the real father of Isaac. After all, Abraham and Sarah had been married for many years and Sarah never gave birth. The Midrash states that the baby, Isaac, was identical in appearance to Abraham, quickly putting all the rumors to rest.

Why at this particular time does Abimelech now approach Abraham to seek an alliance and conclude a covenant of peace with Abraham, after all, Abraham had always been known in the region as a kind man and a person of peace?

Some of the commentators speculate that once Abimelech saw that Hagar and Ishmael were cruelly sent away from Abraham's house at Sarah's request (Genesis 21:14), Abimelech concluded that there was a cruel side to Abraham that he had never seen before. This raised concerns for Abimelech that perhaps Abraham and his progeny could be dangerous neighbors for his descendants. He therefore sought to seal a covenant of peace with Abraham. Other commentators note that Abimelech was impressed by the many miracles that G-d had performed for Abraham: That Abraham and his family were not harmed by the destruction of Sodom; that Abraham had defeated the four most powerful kings of the time (Genesis 14); the miraculous birth of Isaac in Abraham's old age; and that Sarah was saved from any harm at the hands of two most powerful contemporary kings, Pharaoh and Abimelech.

The Sforno suggests that Abimelech comes to Abraham to tell him that it is only because G-d is with Abraham that he fears Abraham and desires a treaty—not because of Abraham's wealth or might.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that Abimelech knew that G-d had promised that a mighty nation would descend from Abraham, and now, with the birth of Isaac, he recognizes that this little boy represents the future people of Israel. After the birth of Isaac and the expulsion of Ishmael, the prophecy was becoming a reality, causing Abimelech to desire a treaty. The treaty that Abraham concludes with Abimelech is the subject of major controversy among the commentators. Many of the sages considered it improper for Abraham to enter into a treaty in which Abraham limits his descendants' rights to the Promised Land. Some even conclude, that this oath actually prevented the Israelites in the time of Joshua from conquering Jerusalem where the Philistines had settled (Joshua 15:63).

The Midrash Samuel 12:1 on I Samuel 6:1 stresses that G-d was displeased with this treaty. G-d said to Abraham: "You gave him [Abimelech] seven ewes: As you (Abraham) live, I will delay the joy of your children for seven generations [for the Jews were not able to conquer the land of Israel until seven generations had passed—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kehat, Amram, and Moses]."

"You gave him seven ewes: As you live, Abimelech's descendants will slay seven righteous men of your descendants: Hofni, Phineas, Samson, and Saul together with his three sons."

"You gave him seven ewes: Accordingly seven of your descendants' sanctuaries will be destroyed [or cease to be used]. The Mishkan—the tent of meeting, the sanctuaries in Gilgal, Nob, Gibeon, and Shilo, as well as the two Temples [in Jerusalem]."

"You gave him seven ewes: My ark will therefore be exiled for seven months in Philistine territory" (I Samuel 6:1).

There are even those who suggest that immediately after the Exodus from Egypt, Moses was unable to lead the people through the land of the Philistines directly to the Promised Land because of the covenant that

Abraham had made with Abimelech, causing the people to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

Some modern commentators even suggest that the citizens of the State of Israel today are paying the price in contemporary times for Abraham's improper covenant with Abimelech, which, in some way, obliquely justifies the unjust claims of the contemporary "Philistines"—the Palestinians.

Thus, we see that all the actions of our great ancestors, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, impact on the future destiny of the People of Israel.

The brief biblical text concerning the alliance between Abraham and Abimelech, continues to reverberate profoundly throughout the millennia of Jewish history.

May you be blessed.

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**Rabbi Yissochar Frand**

During the process in which the Almighty destroyed the wicked cities of Sodom and Amora, the Torah teaches, "And so it was when G-d destroyed the cities of the plain, that G-d remembered Avraham; so he sent Lot from amidst the upheaval when He overturned the cities in which Lot had lived." [Bereshis 19:29] Lot was saved from the destruction of Sodom, but the Torah seems to teach that it was only because Hashem remembered Avraham that He decided to save Lot.

Rashi comments on what it was that Hashem remembered: Hashem remembered that Lot kept quiet in Egypt when Avraham told the Egyptians that Sarah was his sister, rather than admitting that she was his wife. Lot did not "squeal" on his uncle. It was this "merit" that caused Hashem to allow Lot to be rescued from Sodom.

The commentaries on Rashi are bothered by several points. The Maharal in Gur Aryeh argues that the simple interpretation of the pasuk, "Hashem remembered Avraham" is that G-d remembered that Avraham loved Lot. Avraham already risked his life to save Lot in the war of the Four Kings against the Five Kings. Clearly, Avraham would be greatly anguished if Lot was wiped out during the destruction of Sodom. According to the Maharal, this is the simple interpretation of the words "Hashem remembered Avraham."

Furthermore, Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi asks, if Rashi is seeking sources for Lot's merit, why does he choose to mention the fact that Lot did not squeal on his uncle in Egypt? Rashi should have pointed out that Lot had merit for leaving his homeland and his birthplace to follow Avraham when the latter journeyed to the unknown destination in accordance with the Almighty's command. Remember — Lot left Charan. He went with Avraham Avinu. The Torah considers this a very big deal. Why does Rashi not say that Lot was saved in the merit of following Avraham?

The Maharal, in answering these questions, writes what he calls a very big sod [secret mystical teaching]. "The merit that Lot had, for which he was saved — namely he did not reveal to the Egyptians that Sarah was really Avraham's wife — contains hidden meaning, which is one of the Torah's secrets." I cannot fully explain the Maharal because I do not really understand his explanation about "the Torah's secrets." However, it is clear that the Maharal is saying that the reason Lot was saved in the merit of keeping quiet was because through that action "Lot gained a connection and a relationship with Avraham" (Tzeeruf v'Yichus l'Avraham). This connection that Lot established with Avraham Avinu saved his life. By keeping quiet at that moment, he earned protection in the future via this newfound "partnership" with Avraham.

The Maharal explains his understanding of the "connection" Lot established with Avraham, and I encourage everyone to study this Maharal and see what

they can gain from it. I, however, want to share an insight on this matter that I heard from the present-day Tolner Rebbe of Yerushalayim, Rav Yitzchak Menachem Weinberg, shlit" a, which I believe is a brilliant analysis and a tremendous insight into human psychology.

The Mishna says in Avos that anyone who possesses the following three qualities is among the disciples of Avraham Avinu: A "good eye" (i.e., a generous person); a "humble spirit"; and a "nefesh shefeilah" (which we will explain presently). The Maharal in Avos elaborates: Every human being is born as a "stingy-eyed person" possessing the characteristic of "I want to have, and I do not want you to have." This is a terrible attribute, but you should know that we all have this attribute. We were all born with it! Furthermore, we were all born with tremendous egos (the opposite of a "humble spirit") and it is a life's work to try and gain a little humility. Finally, we are all born — says the Maharal — with a "nefesh rechava" (opposite of "nefesh shefeilah"). We all want the whole world. We have insatiable appetites. There is an old Yiddish saying — all babies come into this world with their fists clenched, as if to say, we want to have it all. That is how we come into the world — miserly, egotistical, and with insatiable appetites for all the pleasures of this world.

Avraham Avinu conquered his natural inclination and managed to emulate the opposite of all three of these natural characteristics. He was a "tov ayin" — a giving and generous person. (It is hard to find an equivalent English translation for the expression "tov ayin", but there is a Yiddish expression which captures it — to fargin. Fargin means I am happy for your success. This concept is so difficult to translate into other languages, that in modern Hebrew there is a verb called l'fargain which means to fargin! To accomplish this attribute — "tov ayin / the ability to fargin".) Avraham Avinu had to overcome his nature.

Likewise, Avraham Avinu was born with an ego, but he overcame it. He developed a "ruach nemucha" — a humble spirit. Finally, Avraham Avinu was born — like we all were — with an insatiable appetite, but he refined himself and developed a "nefesh shefeilah". These were his spiritual accomplishments in life.

Note — the Mishna does not say about the person who introduced monotheism to the world that whoever is a believer is a disciple of Avraham Avinu. No, being a believer alone does not qualify a person as a disciple of Avraham Avinu. The characteristic that makes a person into a disciple of Avraham Avinu is the capacity to rule over his inborn inclinations. Doing something which overrules a person's nature is what makes a person a true disciple of the Patriarch Avraham.

The Maharal says that Lot established a "linkage" with Avraham Avinu for which he merited being saved from Sodom's destruction. In order to become connected to Avraham Avinu, a person must demonstrate some type of rule over his natural inclinations. He needs to show he can dominate his own natural instincts.

Lot was not such a righteous individual. In fact, Rashi explains that the reason Lot was instructed by the angels not to look back when fleeing Sodom was because he was no better than the Sodomites, and was only being saved in Avraham's merit. Therefore, he was not worthy to enjoy seeing other people's destruction while he escaped, given the fact that he was as bad as they were.

Lot had all the same lusts as the Sodomites, so how did he demonstrate that he was like the disciples of Avraham Avinu? The Tolner Rebbe says that Lot demonstrated this by conquering one of the great taivos and yetzer haras (i.e., overcoming an almost universal human temptation): He overcame the great temptation of revealing a secret.

What happens when someone tells you "I want to tell you something that is top secret, but I do not want you to tell it to another soul"? Typically, your mouth burns up with the confidential information: I need to tell this to somebody! Do we not all find ourselves in that situation?

Why is there such an evil inclination to tell secrets? The Tolner Rebbe says — and this is the truth — we want to tell secrets because it means "I am a

some-body. I am not a no-body." I have information that someone else needs and wants. I am needed to provide this secret information. Nobody wants to be a nobody. There is thus a great lust to share information that is not available to another party.

The Tolner Rebbe invites us to picture the scene: Avraham arrives in Egypt.

It is a big deal. Everybody is talking about this distinguished visitor from Canaan. Lot goes into a restaurant or a bar and everybody is talking about Avraham Avinu and about the beautiful sister who arrived with him. Lot is sitting there thinking to himself "Sister? Hah! I know the truth!" Lot has a tremendous urge to shout out, "You fools! He sold you a bill of goods. She is not his sister. She is his wife! She is his Rebbetzin!"

Lot does not do that. He keeps quiet. He maintains a poker face. Silence. There is no greater conquest of a person's natural inclination than this. With that, he became linked to Avraham Avinu. The identifying mark of a disciple of Avraham Avinu is one who can conquer his natural instincts, his desires. This was Lot's achievement, and this was his source of merit.

Lot was not saved by the fact that he welcomed guests into his home in Sodom. Lot did learn hospitality from living in the household of Avraham, but that does not demonstrate conquest of his evil inclination. Hosting guests demonstrates kindness but being able to keep quiet in the face of overwhelming temptation to "be a some-body" and spill the beans — that demonstrates a person ruling over his baser instincts. That demonstrates being a true partner and disciple of Avraham Avinu.

The Tolner Rebbe brings from Kabbalistic tradition that the neshama of Lot, later (through the process of Gilgul Neshamos — transmigration of souls), became the neshama of Yehudah, the son of Yaakov Avinu. Then, in subsequent generations, it transmigrated further and became the neshama of Boaz, the husband of Rus.

The Tolner Rebbe elaborates: Where do we find another person who went against the temptation of every sinew in his body, and did something about which his natural inclination was advising him "Do not do this"? Yehudah the son of Yaakov. When Tamar was accused of being unfaithful, Yehudah knew the truth (that he impregnated her). However, it was so embarrassing. He could have kept silent. Nevertheless, he publicly admits, "She is more righteous than I." This demonstrated a powerful conquest of his natural inclination.

This attribute that started with Lot was not yet perfected by Lot. His soul needed a further tikun [improvement]. It achieved further tikun in the body of Yehudah, but it still was not finished. With Boaz, the neshama reached its final pinnacle.

What did Boaz do? Boaz found himself alone with Rus in the tent at night. A young woman is at his feet. The Medrash relates that the Yetzer Hara came to him, grabbed him by the throat and said to him "she is unmarried; you are unmarried; what is the problem? Go ahead!" He firmly resolved that he would take no action that night, because the Rabbis forbade sexual relations even between unmarried parties without betrothal and marriage. This required incredible conquest of his inclination. This is where Lot's neshama reached its final tikun.

The Tolner Rebbe concluded by citing an amazing Medrash. The Medrash teaches that prior to the establishment of the system of reading weekly Torah portions from consecutive sections of the Torah, the original custom was to read "the section of Lot" every Shabbos. What does this mean? The Matnos Kehunah explains that the section of Lot (including his incestuous relations with his daughters) is about arayos [forbidden relations] and arayos are such a powerful lust that it is important to constantly be warned against them. This is a difficult explanation because there are many other Biblical portions that warn much more explicitly against forbidden sexual relationships. What then is the meaning of the Medrash?

The Tolner Rebbe gives his own explanation. The Gemara says that Rav Shimon bar Yochai's mother talked a lot. Rav Shimon went to his mother and, in the politest manner, told her, "Mother, it was with great difficulty that the Rabbis allowed one to say 'Shabbos Shalom' on Shabbos". In other

words, the Rabbis frowned on excessive conversation on Shabbos and it was only with great difficulty that they allowed even the exchange of “Good Shabbos” greetings with one another. Shabbos is meant to be a day for the soul, not for the body. Shabbos can seem like the greatest day to schmooze because we have so much time on our hands. However, Rav Shimon Bar Yochai told his elderly mother that she should conquer her yetzer hara to talk, by speaking less on Shabbos.

Where do we find someone in the Torah who conquered his evil inclination to talk? It was Lot, as explained earlier. The Tolner Rebbe says this is why the Medrash teaches that they used to read Parshas Lot every single Shabbos — to teach us that we should be able to overcome the tremendous Yetzer Hara that we have to schmooze, even when the schmoozing is fundamentally permitted, but still, “with difficulty they allowed the greeting of ‘Shabbos Shalom’ on Shabbos.

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**Revelation Revealed:** Parshat Vayeira

Based on a **Naaleh.com** shiur by **Mrs. Shira Smiles**

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Parshat Vayeira begins with Hashem appearing to Avraham as he sits in the opening of his tent in the heat of day. Hashem does not speak to him at this point, and the Torah immediately shifts its focus to the three strangers on the road whom Avraham rushes to invite. Only after all this does Hashem inform Avraham of His plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

We can ask several questions. First, the Torah writes that Hashem appeared to him without specifying to whom Hashem appeared. Rashi therefore explains that this verse is connected to the previous parsha that ends with Avraham circumcising himself and all the males in his household. Hashem then appeared to perform the kindness of visiting the sick.

The Gur Aryeh, citing Mizrachi, disagrees. He maintains that Hashem actually came to speak to Avraham but was interrupted with the arrival of the three traveling men. The message came after Avraham made all the preparations to serve his guests.

The problem with this interpretation is that before Hashem speaks to Avraham, Hashem seems to contemplate whether He should tell him of the impending destruction, and only after careful consideration of Avraham’s character and mission does He actually speak to him.

The final question is about the chronology of the events. What is the connection between the arrival of three angels and Hashem’s appearance to Avraham?

Rashi explains that Hashem’s visit was specifically to visit Avraham and not to impart prophecy. The Derash Dovid adds that often people assume that the only reason to visit the sick is to offer him help or prayer which is erroneous. The visit itself encourages and strengthens the sick person. The Divine Presence had this healing effect on Avraham.

The Ramban says that Hashem came to Avraham to heal him. The Lev Tahor asks, we know that one of the guests was the angel Gavriel, who came specifically to heal Avraham. If so, what was Hashem’s intent? The Lev Tahor explains, while Gavriel was indeed sent to heal Avraham physically, Hashem came to restore his energy.

Rashi further notes that Hashem appeared to Avraham on the third day after the circumcision. If He wanted to heal Avraham, why did He not come on the first day? The Likutei Sichot notes that when we do a mitzvah we should perform it as naturally as possible so as to bring the greatest sanctity into the world. When one struggles with a mitzvah, either physically or emotionally, the effort itself brings greater sanctity to the world. Therefore Hashem waited until the third day, the natural day of healing, before He appeared to

Avraham. There are no shortcuts in spiritual elevation and in creating a connection to Hashem.

Hashem did come to Avraham on previous occasions. But on each of these occasions He either spoke to him or gave him a specific command. This is the first time Hashem appears to Avraham without any follow up. To this, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes, we can deduce that after his circumcision, Avraham himself and his home were comfortable places for Hashem to rest His presence. It was only now that Avraham was worthy of being such a vehicle for Hashem’s presence on earth. As the Shemen Afarsimon notes, that is why the verse states, “And appeared to him Hashem,” paying homage to Avraham’s now exalted status by placing “to him” before Hashem in the text.

It is for this purpose that man was created, to overcome the physicality of our lives and elevate it to the spiritual, to use our bodies in the performance of mitzvot.

Rabbi Belsky points out that by visiting Avraham at a time of his weakness, Hashem demonstrated personal care and attention. He showed that He cared for the physical needs of people and for their emotional needs. Similarly, our acts of chesed to others should include ways we can provide them with chizuk, emotional support, self-respect and hope in addition to anything physical they may require.

Rabbi Milevsky cites the Gemara in Shavuot that states that “offering hospitality to guests takes precedence over welcoming the Divine Presence.” In other words Avraham left Hashem’s presence to tend to his guests. We too should sacrifice our own spiritual growth (and certainly physical convenience and pleasure) for the performance of a mitzvah.

In truth, writes the Mesameach Zion, everything in the world, every leaf and flower, cries out Hashem’s presence. Our faces reflect our soul which is a piece of Godliness. The purpose of this world is to reveal Hashem’s presence. But we can get so caught up in the physical world that God’s presence is hidden from us, and being aware of Him becomes a challenge. Avraham Avinu entered a different and expanded dimension of Hashem’s awareness after his circumcision.

Rabbi Tauber explains that there is a difference in our understanding between hearing and seeing. While hearing may touch us on a spiritual and emotional level, it does not carry the same validity as seeing something “with our own eyes.” Until now, Abraham heard God’s voice and knew esoterically that God existed. But now Avraham was able to “see” Hashem, and nothing could ever shake that belief. Seeing substantiates what was previously only known deductively.

Rabbi Apfel continues with this idea. Avraham was able to see the spiritual core within the bodies of the three men approaching him. The spiritual and the physical melded. Avraham understood that within this prophecy, there was no difference between the physical and the spiritual, since everything physical is also spiritual and prophetic. Men appear, but Avraham sees angels.

All of us have this spiritual yearning to see Hashem in everything, to elevate our physical experiences to a spiritual level. Carpooling children, for example, can be reframed into transporting living sifrei Torah, and cooking can be preparation for strengthening the body to do mitzvot. Through acts of chessed, we can focus not only on the physical aspects, but on the spiritual and emotional needs of others.

Just as Avraham Avinu achieved such clarity of Hashem’s presence after his circumcision, may we too achieve clarity and merit to attach ourselves to Hashem in the physical world in which we exist.

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## Purity of Speech

Solomon, the wisest of men, cautioned: “The tongue has power over death and life” (Proverbs 18:21).

In prayer, we elevate our power of speech, as we express holy thoughts and aspirations. And when we conclude the Amidah, we add a special prayer: that we may maintain this purity of speech throughout the day. This short prayer was composed by the fourth-century scholar Mar, son of Ravina:

“ג-ל-ה-י נ-צו-ר ל-ש-ו-נ-י מ-ר-ע, ו-י-ש-פ-ת-י מ-ד-ב-ר מ-ר-מ-ה.”

“My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully.” (Berachot 17a)

What is the difference between speaking evil and speaking deceitfully?

### Two Pitfalls of Communication

This prayer uses two different words for “language”: lashon and saphah.

These two words, Rav Kook explained, correspond to two aspects of speech:

The inner meaning of our words, the message we intend to communicate;

Their external “attire” — how our words are interpreted by others.

The word lashon literally means “tongue.” As indicated by the tongue’s location inside the mouth, lashon refers to the inner intent of our speech.

Saphah, on the other hand, literally means “lip.” This refers to the external aspect of speech, how our words are understood by others. It is called saphah since the lips help form the sounds of speech outside the mouth.

There are two major pitfalls in speech, and we ask for Divine guidance in both areas. The first issue relates to the intention and content of our words. Speech that is meant to be manipulative or hurtful is clearly wrong. We pray that our lashon — the intent of our speech — should be sincere and free of malicious motives. “Guard my tongue from evil.”

The second pitfall concerns the second aspect of communication: how we are understood by others. If we do not express ourselves clearly, our words will fail to convey our true intent. Sometimes we may be tempted to prevaricate and deceive others. Therefore we pray that our saphah — the external expression of our speech — will not be misleading or duplicitous. “And guard my lips from speaking deceitfully.”

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### Praying for a Rainy Day when Traveling to or from Eretz Yisroel in November By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Whereas in chutz la’aretz ve’sein tal umatar (the prayer for rain added to the beracha of Boreich Aleinu in the weekday shemoneh esrei) is not recited until the evening of December Fourth (this year; the exact date varies), people in Eretz Yisroel began reciting this prayer on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. This difference in practice leads to many interesting shaylos. Here are some examples:

Question #1:

Yankel, who lives in New York, is in aveilos, l’a, for his father, and tries to lead services at every opportunity. He will be visiting Eretz Yisroel during the month of November. Does he recite the prayer according to the Eretz Yisroel practice while there? Which version does he recite in his quiet shemoneh esrei? Perhaps he should not even lead services while he is there?

Question #2:

Does someone from chutz la’aretz who is currently attending yeshiva or seminary in Eretz Yisroel recite ve’sein tal umatar according to the custom of Eretz Yisroel or according to the chutz la’aretz practice?

Question #3:

Reuven lives in Eretz Yisroel, but is in chutz la’aretz on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Does he begin reciting ve’sein tal umatar while in chutz la’aretz, does he wait until he returns to Eretz Yisroel, or does he follow the practice of those who live in chutz la’aretz?

In order to explain the halachic issues involved in answering these shaylos, we must first explain why we begin requesting rain in Eretz Yisroel on a date different from that in chutz la’aretz.

The Gemara (Taanis 10a) concludes that in Eretz Yisroel, one begins reciting ve’sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, whereas in Bavel one begins reciting it on the sixtieth day after the autumnal equinox. (The Gemara’s method for calculating the

autumnal equinox is not based on the solar year, but on a different calculation. The reason for this is beyond the scope of this article.) Someone who recites ve’sein tal umatar during the summer months in Eretz Yisroel must repeat the shemoneh esrei, since this request in the summer is inappropriate (Taanis 3b; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 117:3).

### WHY ARE THERE TWO DIFFERENT “RAIN DATES”?

Since Eretz Yisroel requires rain earlier than Bavel, Chazal instituted that the Jews in Eretz Yisroel begin requesting rain shortly after Sukkos. In Bavel, where it was better if it began raining later, reciting ve’sein tal umatar was delayed until later. This practice is followed in all of chutz la’aretz, even in places where rain is not seasonal, or where rain is needed earlier -- although the precise reason why all of chutz la’aretz follows the practice of Bavel is uncertain (see Rashi and Rosh to Taanis 10a; Shu”t Rosh 4:10; Tur and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 117, and my article on reciting ve’sein tal umatar in the southern hemisphere).

### LOCAL CONDITIONS

If a certain city needs rain at a different time of the year, can they, or should they recite ve’sein tal umatar then? The Gemara (Taanis 14b) raises this question and cites the following story:

“The people of the city of Nineveh (in contemporary Iraq) sent the following shaylah to Rebbe: In our city, we need rain even in the middle of the summer. Should we be treated like individuals, and request rain in the beracha of Shma Koleinu, or like a community and recite ve’sein tal umatar during the beracha of Boreich Aleinu? Rebbe responded that they are considered individuals and should request rain during the beracha of Shma Koleinu.”

This means that an individual or a city that needs rain during a different part of the year should recite ve’sein tal umatar during the beracha of Shma Koleinu, but not as part of Boreich Aleinu.

### NATIONAL CONDITIONS

Is a country different from a city? In other words, if an entire country or a large region requires rain at a different time of the year, should its residents recite ve’sein tal umatar during the beracha of Boreich Aleinu? The Rosh raises this question and contends, at least in theory, that a country should recite ve’sein tal umatar in Boreich Aleinu. In his opinion, most of North America and Europe should recite ve’sein tal umatar during the summer months. Although we do not follow this approach, someone who recites ve’sein tal umatar at a time when his country requires rain should not repeat the Shemoneh esrei, but should rely retroactively on the opinion of the Rosh (Shulchan Aruch and Rama 117:2). Similarly, someone in chutz la’aretz who recited ve’sein tal umatar as part of Boreich Aleinu in error after the Seventh of MarCheshvan should not repeat Shemoneh esrei afterwards, unless he lives in a country where rain is not necessary at this time (Birkei Yosef 117:3; cf. Shu”t Ohalei Yaakov #87 of the Maharikash, who disagrees.).

With this introduction, we can now begin to discuss the questions at hand. What should someone do if he lives in Eretz Yisroel but is in chutz la’aretz, or vice versa, during the weeks when there is a difference in practice between the two places? As one can imagine, much halachic literature discusses this shaylah, although I am surprised to report that I found no discussion concerning this question dating back to the Rishonim. I found three early opinions, which I quote in chronological order:

Opinion #1.

The earliest opinion I found, that of the Maharikash (Shu”t Ohalei Yaakov #87) and the Radbaz (Shu”t #2055), discusses specifically an Eretz Yisroel resident who left his wife and children behind while traveling to chutz la’aretz. (In earlier generations, it was common that emissaries from the Eretz Yisroel communities traveled to chutz la’aretz for long periods of time to solicit funds.) These poskim ruled that if the traveler is leaving his family behind in Eretz Yisroel, he should begin reciting ve’sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, following the practice of Eretz Yisroel, regardless of whether he himself was then in Eretz Yisroel or in chutz la’aretz. However, if he is single, or alternatively, if he is traveling with his family, then when he begins reciting ve’sein tal umatar depends on whether he will be gone for the entire rainy season. If he leaves Eretz Yisroel before the Seventh of MarCheshvan and intends to be gone until Pesach or later, he recites ve’sein tal umatar according to the practice of chutz la’aretz. If he intends to return before Pesach, he recites ve’sein tal umatar beginning on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, even though he is in chutz la’aretz.

The key question here is, what is the criterion for determining when someone recites ve’sein tal umatar? These poskim contend that it depends on his personal need. If his immediate family is in Eretz Yisroel, it is considered that his personal need requires rain already on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Therefore, he begins reciting ve’sein tal umatar on that date, even should he himself be in chutz la’aretz (Shu”t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:102).

Opinion #2.

The Pri Chodosh (Orach Chayim 117) quotes the previous opinion (of the Maharikash and the Radbaz) and disputes their conclusion, contending that only one factor determines when the traveler begins reciting ve'sein tal umatar – how long he plans to stay abroad. If he left Eretz Yisroel intending to be away for at least a year, he should consider himself a resident of chutz la'aretz (for this purpose) and begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar in December. If he intends to be away for less than a year, he should begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Furthermore, the Pri Chodosh states that whether one leaves one's immediate family behind or not does not affect this halacha.

These two approaches disagree fundamentally regarding what determines when an individual recites ve'sein tal umatar? According to Opinion #1 (the Maharikash and the Radbaz), the main criterion is whether one has a personal need for rain as early as the Seventh of MarCheshvan. According to Opinion #2 (the Pri Chodosh), the issue is whether one is considered a resident of Eretz Yisroel or of chutz la'aretz.

According to this analysis of Opinion #2, a resident of chutz la'aretz who intends to spend a year in Eretz Yisroel begins reciting ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, whereas, if he intends to stay less than a year, he follows the practice of chutz la'aretz (Pri Megadim; Mishnah Berurah; cf. however Halichos Shelomoh, Volume 1 8:28 pg. 107). However, according to Opinion #1, he would begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan if he or his family intend to spend any time during the rainy season in Eretz Yisroel.

#### Opinion #3.

The Birkei Yosef quotes the two above-mentioned opinions and also other early poskim who follow a third approach, that the determining factor is where you are on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. (See also Shu"t Dvar Shmuel #323.) This approach implies that someone who is in Eretz Yisroel on the Seventh of MarCheshvan should begin praying for rain, even though he intends to return to chutz la'aretz shortly, and that someone who is in chutz la'aretz on that date should not, even though he left his family in Eretz Yisroel.

Dvar Shmuel and Birkei Yosef explain that someone needs rain where he is, and it is not dependent on his residence. Birkei Yosef points out that if there is a severe drought where he is located, it does not make any difference if he lives elsewhere; he will be a casualty of the lack of water. This was certainly true in earlier generations, when water supply was dependent on local wells. Even today, when water is supplied via piping from large reservoirs, this opinion would still rule that the halacha is determined by one's current location, and not one's permanent residence.

Opinion #3 (the Birkei Yosef's approach) is fairly similar to that of Opinion #1 (the Maharikash and the Radbaz), in that both approaches see the determining factor to be temporary need and not permanent residency. However, these two opinions dispute several details, including what is the ruling of someone in chutz la'aretz whose family remains in Eretz Yisroel. According to Opinion #1, this person begins ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, whereas Opinion #3 contends that he begins only when the other bnei chutz la'aretz do.

Why does Opinion #3 disregard his family being in Eretz Yisroel as a factor, whereas Opinion #1 is concerned with this fact? Birkei Yosef explains that praying for rain for one's family when one is in chutz la'aretz is praying for an individual need, which one does in Shma Koleinu, not in Boreich Aleinu, since the rest of the community there has no need for rain. Opinion #1 presumably holds that praying for Eretz Yisroel when I am in chutz la'aretz is not considered praying for an individual, even though my reason to pray for rain in Eretz Yisroel is personal.

After analyzing these three conflicting opinions, how do we rule? Although the later poskim, such as the Mishnah Berurah, refer to these earlier sources, it is unclear how they conclude halachically. (See Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer 6:38, which contains a careful analysis of the words of the Mishnah Berurah on this subject.) Thus, an individual should ask his Rav what to do in each case.

#### TRAVELING AND RETURNING

What does one do if he travels and returns within these days? Assuming that he began to recite ve'sein tal umatar on the Seventh of MarCheshvan because he was in Eretz Yisroel (and he followed those opinions that rule this way), does he now stop reciting it upon his return to chutz la'aretz?

This question is raised by the Birkei Yosef (117:6), who rules that he continues reciting ve'sein tal umatar when he returns to chutz la'aretz.

What does one do if he is reciting ve'sein tal umatar, and the community is not, or vice versa -- and he would like to lead the services? Birkei Yosef rules that he should not lead the communal services; however, if he forgot and did so, he should follow his own version in the quiet Shemoneh esrei and the community's version in the repetition (Birkei Yosef 117:8). However, Rav Shlomoh Zalman Auerbach permitted him to lead the services, following the community's practice in his public prayer and his own in his private one (Halichos Shelomoh 5:21; note that according to Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:23, 29; 4:33 he should not lead the services.).

Let us now examine some of the shaylos we raised above:

#### Question #1:

Yankel, who lives in New York, would like to lead services when visiting Eretz Yisroel during the month of November.

According to all of the opinions involved, when davening privately Yankel should not recite ve'sein tal umatar until it is recited in chutz la'aretz, since he does not live in Eretz Yisroel, does not have immediate family living there, and was not there on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. As explained above, according to most opinions, he should not lead the services, since he is not reciting ve'sein tal umatar and the congregation is, whereas according to Rav Shlomoh Zalman Auerbach, he may lead the services.

According to Birkei Yosef (Opinion #3 above), if he is in Eretz Yisroel on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, he should begin to recite ve'sein tal umatar then, since he now has a need for rain; he should continue to recite this prayer even when he returns to chutz la'aretz. However, in this case, when returning to chutz la'aretz, he should not lead services, according to most opinions, since he is reciting ve'sein tal umatar and they are not. If he forgot and led the services, he should recite ve'sein tal umatar in the quiet Shemoneh esrei but not in the repetition.

According to the Pri Chodosh (Opinion #2 above), if he is in Eretz Yisroel on the Seventh of MarCheshvan, he should not recite ve'sein tal umatar, since he lives in chutz la'aretz. Following this approach, he should not lead services when in Eretz Yisroel, but he may resume when he returns to chutz la'aretz.

#### Question #2:

Does someone attending Yeshiva or seminary in Eretz Yisroel, recite ve'sein tal umatar according to the custom of Eretz Yisroel or according to the chutz la'aretz practice?

The answer to this question will depend upon which of the above-quoted authorities one follows. According to Opinion #1 (the Maharikash, the Radbaz) and Opinion #3 (the Birkei Yosef), they should follow the practice of Eretz Yisroel, since they need the rain, while in Eretz Yisroel, even though they are not permanent Israeli residents. According to Opinion #2 (the Pri Chodosh), if they are staying for less than a year, they follow the practice of chutz la'aretz, whereas if they are staying longer, they should begin reciting it from the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Several people have told me that Rav Elyashiv ruled that they should recite ve'sein tal umatar while they are in Eretz Yisroel, unless they intend to return before the end of the rainy season.

#### Question #3:

Reuven lives in Eretz Yisroel, but is in chutz la'aretz on the Seventh of MarCheshvan. Does he begin reciting ve'sein tal umatar while in chutz la'aretz, does he wait until he returns to Eretz Yisroel, or does he follow the practice of those who live in chutz la'aretz?

According to Opinions #1 and #2, he should follow the practice of those living in Eretz Yisroel, but for different reasons. According to Opinion #1, the reason is because he knows that he will return to Eretz Yisroel during the rainy season and therefore follows the practice there. According to Opinion #2, since he left Eretz Yisroel for less than a year he is considered an Eretz Yisroel resident.

Although it would seem that the Birkei Yosef (Opinion #3) would hold that he should not recite ve'sein tal umatar until the bnei chutz la'aretz do, it is not absolutely clear that he would disagree with the other poskim in this case. One could explain that he ruled only that one follows the bnei chutz la'aretz if he is there for an extended trip, but not if he is there for only a few weeks that happen to coincide with the Seventh of MarCheshvan. For this reason, when someone recently asked me this shaylah, I ruled that he should follow the practice of those dwelling in Eretz Yisroel. Subsequently, I found this exact shaylah in Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer (6:38), and was very happy to find that he ruled the same way I had. (However, Halichos Shelomoh 8:19 rules that he should recite ve'sein tal umatar in Shma Koleinu and not in Boreich Aleinu.)

#### CONCLUSION

Rashi (Breishis 2:5) points out that until Adam HaRishon appeared, there was no rain in the world. Rain fell and grasses sprouted only after Adam was created, understood that rain was necessary for the world and prayed to Hashem for rain. Whenever we pray for rain, we must remember that the essence of prayer is drawing ourselves closer to Hashem.