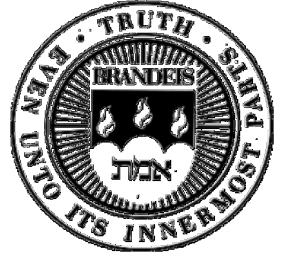




תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

20 Cheshvan 5770 / 7 November 2009 Vol. XI Issue 11

PARSHAT VAYEIRA

Candle-lighting: 4:13 pm
Shacharit: 9 am
Sof Kriat Shema: 8:57 am
Sof Zman Tefilla: 9:47 am
Mincha 3:55 pm
Shkia: 4:30 pm
Motzei Shabbat: 5:15 pm

B'Toch

Ha'ir

By Rabbi Kaplowitz

Empathetic

Morals

By Noah Fields '12

Parsha in a Box

- Three "men" visit Avraham and he does the *mitzvah* of *hachnasat orchim*, welcoming guests!
- Avraham is told that Sarah is going to have a baby and that Sodom is going to be destroyed
- Avraham tries to save Sodom
- The two angels save Lot and his family
- Avraham and Sarah go to Gerar
- Sarah gives birth to Yitzchak and he gets a *brit milah*
- Hagar and Yishmael get sent away

This past week marked the 15th *yarzheit* of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. Reb Shlomo changed the face of the Jewish people with his songs, spirituality and stories. One of the themes repeated throughout his stories is the notion of the *tzadik* and what it means to be a *tzadik*. He popularized the notion of the *lamed vav tzadikim* – the 36 secret righteous people – who assumed the identity of common, even deplorable, people. With this in mind I would like to explore the notion of what it means to be a *tzadik* as found in this week's *parsha*.

The *parsha* contains the chilling and inspiring story of Avraham's negotiating on behalf of the people of Sodom. I get chills when I think of the *chutzpah*, audacity and tremendous courage Avraham displayed in pleading their case before Hashem. In the course of this episode a fascinating point emerges. Avraham says to Hashem, "... What if there should be **fifty innocent within the city (b'toch ha-ir)**; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive if for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it?..." Avraham's description of a *tzadik* is someone who lives and resides *b'toch ha-ir*. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch elaborates on the significance of this description: "[Avraham's] righteous man is to be found *b'toch ha-ir* 'in the midst of the city' and in lively connection with everything and everybody. He never leaves off admonishing, teaching, warning, and betttering wherever and however he can. He takes everybody and everything to heart, he never despairs, is never tired of trying, however distant the hopes of success may be." To be a *tzadik*, according to Rav Hirsch, means to live within the city; to be involved with all facets of society. It means to be concerned and connected with EVERYONE who

Parshat Vayeira is filled with stuff. This *parsha* has everything: Angels visiting Abraham, the destruction of *Sdom* and *Amorah*, the sending away of Ishmael, and the *Akeidah*. The only question is which of all these is the most important or most worthy to be addressed. Perhaps, though, the question is whether there is a connection between these stories other than their juxtaposition. In searching for a connection between all, or at least some, of these stories I found a repeating phrase: "And Abraham arose early in the morning". In fact this specific phrase only appears three times in *Bereishit*, all three times in this *parsha*. It seems unlikely, then, that this is coincidental.

This phrase is best known for its appearance and role in the *Akeidah*. Many of us may have learned about this verse in school: Despite the harshness of G-d's command, Abraham is not only willing, but whole-heartedly takes on the task. After all, he could have woken up later or delayed. Although this fits, it does not entirely seem just. What type of parent, even Avraham, is so willing to give up his son? Avraham, especially, must have had a lot of internal conflict, Yitzhak being his heir. Only upon looking at the other sources, though, can we come to a cohesive thought.

The next (although sequentially, previous) appearance is not as well known. When Sarah tells Avraham to send away Ishmael (and G-d tells him to listen to his wife) he does so: "And Abraham arose early..."(Genesis 21:14). One commentary, the *Da'at Mikrah*, says, "And Abraham arose: even though the deed was evil in the eyes of Abraham." This is a similar response to the one in the *Akeidah*! Although *Da'at Mikrah* doesn't explicitly mention Abraham's piety, it insinuates this same conclusion. Despite the similarities between the uses and interpretations of this *pasuk* and that of the *Akeidah*, I still have a

Shabbat Shalom!

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on page 2)

(Noah Fields continued on page 3)

Avraham's Negotiations With G-d

By Elisha Fredman '10

In this week's *parsha*, Avraham engages in perhaps one of the most audacious arguments ever recorded with Hashem Himself. In *pasuk* 20, Hashem appears to Avraham and tells him that the city of *Sodom* faces impending destruction. Contrary to what one may have expected from Avraham *Avinu*, a person who has demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate his complete and total faith in Hashem, he immediately enters into negotiations. Why did he not simply accept Hashem's word, as he so faithfully did when told to leave his home or to sacrifice his son, to name just two examples?

To answer this question, let's look at Hashem's initial motivation for sending angels to *Sodom* in the first place. On the surface, it seems that the purpose of the angels' visit to *Sodom* is twofold: to save Lot and to destroy the city (hence two angels). But, in fact, there is an even more primary task for which they are sent to *Sodom*. Prior to dispatching the angels, Hashem says: "Let Me descend and I shall see whether they have done altogether as its cry that comes to Me, and if not, I will know" (18:21). The act of "descending" here hints at a kind of examination, as if Hashem must, as it were, go down to *Sodom* in order to take a closer look at *Sodom* and examine the situation in the city at close quarters.

Chazal in fact derive from this understanding that "A judge may rule, in a capital case, only on the basis of eye-witness accounts" (Rashi on 18:21). Where is this Divine intention realized? By reading chapter 19 as a direct continuation of chapter 18, the dispatch of the angels to *Sodom* is, first and foremost, meant as a test and examination of the state that the city is in. On the one hand, if the angels find aspects of righteousness, then perhaps the "cry" that Hashem had heard was a false alarm. On the other hand, if they don't find any "significant" degree of righteousness among the inhabitants of *Sodom*, the city will be destroyed. As such, the angels reaching *Sodom* is a tremendous climax: how many righteous people will the angels encounter? Will *Sodom* escape Divine punishment?

With this understanding of Hashem's initial purpose for sending angels, namely to INVESTIGATE *Sodom*, one can better understand a puzzling difference in the angel's responses to Avraham and Lot when each extends an invitation of hospitality. When Avraham runs towards his guests and bows before them, he invites them to his tent: "Let a little water be brought, that you may wash your feet" (18:4). The angels agree willingly to his invitation: "They said: Do, then, as you have spoken" (18:5). In contrast, when Lot bows before his guests and invites them to his home ("Stay the night, and wash your feet"), the angels decline quite firmly: "No, for we shall stay the night in the street" (19:2). Only after extensive pleading do they concede and turn to his house.

Given that the angels have come to *Sodom* to investigate its merits and evaluate its character, how are they to inspect the city and calculate the number of righteous people who inhabit it from inside Lot's house? Rather, they specify that they wish to sleep in the street, a public place where they will be able to observe the culture and behavior of the local population. When they visited Avraham, by contrast, they were sent as Hashem's agents to pass on good news, and therefore, it is only logical that they would accept his hospitality.

The inhabitants of *Sodom*, however, succeed in demonstrating to the angels what the culture of the city is like, even while they are in Lot's house. The text specifies that around the house there gathered "the people of the city / the people of *Sodom* / both young and old / all the people / from every quarter" (19:4). These five labels for the inhabitants of *Sodom*, mentioned consecutively in a single verse, represent a rare and emphatic emphasis. The intention of the text seems to be to solve Hashem's primary question of how many righteous people live in *Sodom*. All the inhabitants of the city, "from

young to old", clamoring outside to abuse Lot's guests, provide the answer. Avraham asked: "Perhaps there are fifty righteous people in the city?" There aren't fifty; there aren't even ten. The number of righteous people apparently equals the number of members of the household who take upon themselves to care for the guests who have arrived in the city, but they are too few to save *Sodom*.

This seemingly subtle adaptation in understanding Hashem's motivation for engaging *Sodom* and Avraham's advisory function provides a beautiful representation of Avraham's unique relationship with Hashem. At first, Avraham plays a passive role. He is told to leave his home and travel to *Canaan*, and so he does. As Avraham's trust and faith in Hashem develop further, he takes a more active role, going to war to save Lot which, according to both Rashi and Rambam was a one of Hashem's tests. Avraham shows initiative and even risks his life, but he has personal, familial interests serving as his primary motivation. Now, for the first time, we witness Avraham acting as a proactive partner with Hashem. First, Hashem feels it necessary, only fair, to share with Avraham what He is considering doing to *Sodom*: "Shall I conceal from Avraham what I do..." (18: 17-19). Avraham then takes part in this dialogue that Hashem began and suggests what he feels would be fair criteria to apply to Hashem's idea. His tone resonates with equality, mutual respect, and shared purpose.

Perhaps we have just witnessed the fruition of Hashem's command to Avraham in *Brit Mila*: "I am *kel Shakkai*, walk before me and be perfect," because if you do, "I will set my covenant between me and you..." Avraham perceived Hashem's calling, and by answering it with sincerity and devotion, became an eternal partner with Hashem. As children of Avraham, we all share the responsibility of this Divine charge, as well as the reward of this everlasting pledge. Like Avraham, may we all allow ourselves to hear Hashem's voice as it calls us to become active players in our relationship with Him, thereby making us partners in the enhancement and strengthening of Am Yisrael and the entire world.

Elisha eats his grapefruit funny.

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued from page 1)

lives in the city, for all members of society, whether or not they are related to you, members of your community or of the same mindset. It means to be fully entrenched in society -- living exclusively in the ivory tower or the friendly confines of the *Beit Midrash* or the *shul* is not acceptable.

The notion of living as *tzadikim*, as fully committed Jews who are *b'toch ha-ir* describes beautifully the challenge we face as Modern Orthodox Jews living in the 21st Century. We have a responsibility to ensure that we are *tzadikim* in the traditional sense of the word -- people who are committed to *mitzvot* and to living a life of Torah. At the same time, we feel a responsibility to the world around us. We fully involved ourselves in the broader community. We feel responsible for the spiritual and physical welfare of those around us. We care deeply about the hungry and impoverished and do our share to address these societal concerns. We involve ourselves in political discourse and speak out about those issues that matter most to us. We have a sincere concern for our fellow Jew -- whichever community they affiliate with. Indeed, the challenges of living *b'toch ha-ir* are great. It would be easier to close ourselves off and focus on our own spiritual and physical well-being. But to do so would be to ignore the vision so beautifully articulated by Avraham Avinu with two simple words: *b'toch ha-ir*.

Rabbi Kaplowitz Fun Fact: Rabbi Kaplowitz's favorite color is puce.

Actually, Walk in Front of Me

By Josh Jerusalemi '11

Parshat Lech Lecha is filled with covenants and promises. In Genesis 12:2, G-d promises to make Abram into a “great nation;” in 13:14-16, G-d promises Abram his descendents will be innumerable, like “the dust of the earth” and will inherit *Canaan*; in 15:1-5, G-d promises Abram an heir and, again innumerable descendents, like “the stars in the sky.” Yet it is the covenant in 17:1, in which Abram is most affected and transformed.

Here, G-d introduces himself to Abram: “I am the L-rd Almighty. Walk in My ways and be blameless.” Notably, while G-d had spoken to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah and Abram, only *here* does G-d actually introduce Himself. Abram, overwhelmed, “threw himself on his face,” something he had not previously done. G-d then changes Abram’s name to Abraham, and blesses him.

The additional Hebrew “*hey*” in Abraham’s name may be interpreted as Abraham walking with Hashem, but it may be more accurate to see Abraham walking in front of Hashem.

Rashi interprets being “blameless” as G-d asking Abraham to lead a life of complete sincerity and commitment, rather than perfection. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks furthers this idea: reading the latter half of the

verse as “Walk ahead of Me,” G-d is encouraging Abraham to take initiatives. Abraham cannot simply wait until G-d asks him to do something, but rather, he must use his judgment and act on his own volition. While taking chances inherently invites mistakes, Sacks sees this verse as G-d entrusting and empowering Abraham, and by extension us, to take chances and potentially err. Making mistakes defines what it means to be human, and G-d does not ask us to be superhuman, nor perfect in deed, but perfect in terms of our sincerity and commitment. There is a reason G-d made this covenant with Abraham rather than one of his predecessors: Adam and Cain hid from God after sinning, and while Noah did everything G-d had commanded of him, he failed in his collective responsibility to impact others, and as a result, the world was still destroyed. Abraham, however, demonstrated a sense of unequivocal commitment both to G-d (with previous covenants) and to his family (14:15 rescuing Lot from captivity). He is thus commanded to, “*Lech*,” Go, and take initiative, “*Lecha*” for himself. Whether Abraham falls on his face from this daunting task, or out of modesty, he does not deny himself this opportunity and is unprecedentedly rewarded with an invitation to make a covenant with G-d and become the patriarch of the Jewish people.

Josh was confused as to for whom to root: the Phillies or the Yankees. Then he found out the Yankees always have a DH so he roots for them.
TE <3’s Josh.

True Friends

By Michelle Kaplow '12

Parshat Vayeira begins immediately after Avraham performs the commandment of *Brit Milah* on himself and his household. The first words of the *parsha* read, “*Vayeira ailav Hashem*” - “And Hashem appeared to him.” In trying to explain this seemingly sudden appearance of Hashem, the Netivot Shalom writes: up until this point, every time the word “*vayeira*” is used, it is followed immediately by Hashem commanding Avraham to do something. This time, however, the Netivot Shalom suggests a marked change in Hashem’s relationship with Avraham: Hashem lets Avraham meet Him for the first time in a more personal manner.

Rav Soloveitchik expounds on this idea further by raising the question as to why in every other interaction between Hashem and Avraham where the word “*vayeira*” is written, Hashem delivers some sort of message to Avraham, but in the *pasuk* we are discussing, no conversation between Avraham and Hashem takes place. Furthermore, why would Hashem appear to Avraham in the first place if He has nothing to say to him? In order to understand the Rav’s answer, we must first understand what Rashi says on the word “*vayeira*”. According to Rashi, who quotes Rabbi Hanina, Hashem visited Avraham on the third most difficult and painful day following his *Brit Milah*. The Rav adds to this idea by then explaining that, according to Rashi’s explanation of the word, “*vayeira*” means that Hashem came to visit Avraham as a close friend would. This, according to the Rav, touches on the very profound idea that “the highest form of friendship does not require words.” After Avraham completed Hashem’s commandment of *Brit Milah* and entered into a covenant with Hashem, Hashem added a new element of intimacy into His relationship with Avraham; they now had an intense relationship in which Hashem was able to, and did, visit Avraham only to express His love, to be near His close friend. The first words of this week’s *parsha* portray a deep message that is applicable to us all: if we are faithful, loving and committed to Hashem, Hashem will be faithful, loving, and committed in return. May we all be *zoche* to fulfill Hashem’s commandments and to further our relationship with Him.

Michelle has the best nicknames for people.

(Noah Fields continued from page 1)

hard time believing (though I am sure) that Avraham had no hesitations.

With two very similar interpretations it is hard not to take a hint and leave Avraham at being fully righteous. Doing so is fine. The only problem is that this logic and interpretation doesn't fit for the last (first sequentially) time this phrase appears: After G-d and Avraham's dispute about *Sdom* and *Amorah*. After *Sdom* and *Amorah* have been destroyed, after Lot is out of the city and his wife turns to a pillar of salt, Avraham arises to the spot where he had faced G-d. It is here, and only at this point in the dispute, when Avraham feels the need to “Arise early in the morning”(very loose translation). How does this situation – one **after** Avraham's deeds – fit into the pattern.

I spent a number of conversations with people about the destruction of *Sdom* and *Amorah* trying to glean some insight into this question. In one of them I was trying to explore the idea of the destruction of *Sdom* and *Amorah* being a sublime experience (you know who you are), this being the reason for Avraham's early arousal. As a result of something this person said, I thought of this being a human experience, not just a super-human one. Witnessing the destruction of hundreds, if not thousands, is extremely tragic. What struck me, though, was a question behind all this, my key to the truth: **How could Avraham fall asleep?** After pondering this question, I realized that “*Vayashkem*” may not need to imply Abraham's falling asleep – just his arousal! Perhaps then, his early arousal was a result of **not falling asleep**.

Reapplying this conclusion to the other situations, I found that “*Vayashkem*” as “to be woken up,” rather than “to wake up” (implying that he could not sleep), fit the pattern. I am almost certain that if G-d were to tell me that I must send off my son, or sacrifice my heir, I would not be able to sleep. For this reason, not just super human strength, I would be up early in the morning, worrying. It is in this respect, I believe that, as Jews and humans, we have the responsibility not just to worry about our own family, but to also – Like Avraham (and D.K.) - worry about, sympathize with, and give our help to others.

Or you could come to Juggling Club (Or, hopefully, Noah's Commuiversity Class on Juggling)

SHORT VORTS

The Giving Plea

By Alison Uliss '12

Parshat Vayeira begins with Hashem visiting Avraham Avinu after he was circumcised at the age of 99. While most people would have been in bed recuperating at this point, Avraham was instead sitting at the entrance of his tent in search of guests. In order so that Avraham could rest, Hashem made a heat wave so that no travelers would be on the road. But did this prevent Avraham from waiting for guests to come by his tent? No, because the pain of circumcision was nothing compared to the anguish of not doing kindness for others. When Hashem saw this, he brought visitors to Avraham.

Not only did Avraham tend to his guests as soon as he saw them coming, but he interrupted his conversation with Hashem in order to do so. What made him think that it was appropriate to put Hashem on hold for other people? The answer is that there is an experience even greater than talking to G-d, which is to be like G-d. Human beings are created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the image of G-d. G-d is the ultimate giver, and, therefore, we should all be givers as well. We even see this important message through the fact that Hashem Himself visited Avraham. G-d had no business to conduct with and no commandments to deliver to Avraham: He simply visited Avraham to give him happiness in order to make him feel better.

Giving is the foundation of any relationship. When two people are focused on giving to one another, then the relationship flows in two directions and a strong bond is formed. But, when the focus is on taking, then the dynamic pulls in opposite directions, creating strain and tension. The Talmud says there are four individuals who are "considered dead even while they're alive." The common denominator of these people is that they are unable to give. This is seen later in the *parsha* when the city of Sedom was destroyed. The people of Sedom did not understand the importance of giving to others and were selfish people who only lived for themselves, and therefore were killed.

Avraham was the person in Jewish history who, above all else, exemplified doing acts of kindness. His mission in life was to make people happy because he loved all of humanity. He knew that one of the most important and ethical things a person could do is give to others, and that giving to others is much more enjoyable than taking, because taking leaves us ultimately feeling empty.

At this point, you might be thinking that of course it was easy for Avraham to be giving, because he is Avraham Avinu, but being a giving person is not as difficult as we may think. We all can become givers, whether that means volunteering with those who are less fortunate or even by giving someone a smile. Some people think they can only give to those they love, but this is incorrect. The Hebrew word for "give," *hav*, is the same root as *ahava*, which means "love." In fact, giving is what **leads** to love.

We are misled into believing that by giving, we somehow lose out because there will be less for us. That may be true, but only in the short term. In the long term, giving gives us back so much more than we gave. Abraham understood this and, we, as his spiritual heirs, have the same trait within us and responsibility to do the same. When we give of ourselves, we become much better people, we feel better about ourselves, and we make others happy, which in turn makes us even happier. So, come on, get happy (meaning, give)!

Alison signs her emails "Sincerely."

Family Feud: Survey Says...

By Reelee Packer '10

If one were to play a game of Family Feud with "Top Ten Things That Come to Mind When Hearing 'Akeidat Yitzchak'" "Test for Avraham" would probably make it to the survey. But how many votes would "Test for Yitzchak" get?

The *pasuk* reads "*Vayihi Achar Hadivarim Haela, V'Helokim Nisa et Avraham...*" "And it was after these things, and G-d tested Avraham." Recognizing that Yitzchak was old enough to make his own choices, this seems to be a test for him as well. Why is his name omitted from this header?

Before answering this question, we must discuss the reason for *Akeidat Yitzchak*. Why was it that G-d needed to test Avraham at all? The Ramban explains that the test must have been for Avraham's benefit. G-d, the Omniscient One, did not need to see whether Avraham would pass or fail (like a professor). The Ramban teaches that, since humans can only be rewarded for their actions, and not their thoughts, G-d tests us in order to convert our potential into action. According to this logic, the Ramban goes on to say that G-d only tests those who can pass – "*Hashem Tzadik Yivchan*." In other words, since the test only exists to reward the test-taker, it must be impossible for him to fail. Additionally, for someone who has already proven himself in a certain area, there is no longer any reason to test that person.

So what was it about Yitzchak that made this not a test for him? The Alshich Hakadosh, a prominent 16th century Rabbi and *parshan*, explains that Avraham and Yitzchak each had a specific character trait, *middah*. Avraham exemplified kindness, *chesed*. As described earlier in the *Parsha*, Avraham pleaded with G-d to save Sedom; he could not bear to watch people suffer. Yitzchak, on the other hand, exemplified Justice. Therefore, Yitzchak would obediently do that which G-d told him without question, no matter the command. In other words, it was not a test for Yitzchak to lie upon the alter. However, sacrificing one's own son is antithetic to Avraham's idea of *Chessed*. Avraham needed to overcome his nature in order to fulfill the command of G-d.

This explanation contains an important lesson for our lives. When we are in a situation that seems more difficult than we can handle, we must remember that we can pass each and every test that we are given. If the task were impossible, G-d would have no reason to put us in that situation – *Hashem Tzadik Yivchan* – G-d only tests those who can pass. Additionally, when we someone having a difficult time with something which seems so simple to us it is important to remember that we each have our own strengths; what might be simple for us may be someone else's test. *Shabbat Shalom*, and may we all merit to pass as many tests as we are given.

Reelee was the breakfast coordinator for BOO her freshman year. The position hasn't been filled since.

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