



Parshas Vayera

For the week ending 20 Cheshvan 5757
1 & 2 November 1996

Overview

Three days after performing *Bris Mila* on himself, Avraham Avinu is visited by Hashem. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will give birth to a son next year. Hashem reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. Hashem agrees that if there are fifty righteous men in Sodom, He will not destroy it. Avraham manages to 'bargain' Hashem down to ten righteous men. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and Amora. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that, as a result of the destruction, there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk, and through him perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar, where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. At Hashem's command, on the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and her son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but Hashem tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel, and Hashem promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that Hashem is with him. In a tenth and final test, Hashem instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood, and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, Hashem sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of his unquestioning obedience, Hashem now promises Avraham that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Parsha ends with genealogy and the birth of Rivka.

Insights

WHERE ANGELS TREAD

**"And he saw and behold three men were standing over him."
(18:2)**

The three 'men' who stood over Avraham were incorporeal spiritual messengers (angels). Rashi tells us that one angel was to tell Sarah that she would conceive and give birth within the year; one was to overturn Sodom and destroy it; and one was to heal Avraham after the *bris mila*.

Why couldn't one angel have done all this? Is this all too much work for the average angel?

Rashi tells us the reason is because an angel cannot perform two functions. However, in the very next line, Rashi also tells us that after healing Avraham, the angel Raphael went on to rescue Lot from Sodom!

If one angel cannot perform two functions, why wasn't a second angel dispatched to rescue Lot?

To answer this puzzle let us understand why it was that Lot was rescued from Sodom in the first place:

The Lineage of King David

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

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

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

In the Heavens above, and on the earth beneath

The celestial court follows the earthly court. What happens in this world determines the halacha in the higher worlds.

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

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

Continued on Reverse

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Continued From Reverse

Now we can understand why only three angels were sent: At the time when the angels were dispatched, it was not yet clear whether Lot would have the merit to be saved from Sodom. For Lot's merit was that he was the progenitor of Ruth and David. However, David was validated only by the principle that a woman isn't obliged to go out to greet strangers.

Thus only when Avraham answered "Behold — in the tent!" was the halacha clarified that the female Moavites were permitted to marry into the Jewish People, and thus it became necessary for an angel to save Lot, the progenitor of King David.

(Chidushei HaRim in Mayana shel Torah)

THE THIRD MAN

"And he saw and behold three men were standing over him. He perceived, so he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent..." (18:2)

Who were these three men standing over Avraham?

On a mystical level, Avraham perceived that these three were none other than himself, his son Yitzchak and his grandson Yaakov.

Avraham represents kindness and mercy — *rachmanus*. At that time, Avraham was recovering from the *bris mila* that he had performed on himself three days previously: It is on the sick that mercy descends.

In spite of his pain, he steeled himself and ran to greet his guests. This characteristic of self-domination, — *gevurah* — Avraham bequeathed to his son Yitzchak.

And wherever there is to be found the characteristics of Avraham and Yitzchak, there is also to be found their synthesis, Yaakov — to complete the three who stand.

(Kedushas Levi)

BAD COMPANY

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

Kid's play. Innocent rough and tumble. The nursery is the cradle of the developing personality. Lessons learned over "Lego" are for life.

Avraham saw that Yitzchak's future character was in danger merely by playing with his brother Yishmael. And although Avraham was the pillar of kindness, when he recognized the threat to his son, he banished Yishmael and Hagar to the desert with no more than some bread and water.

It may be "only a game," but playing with bad company is like playing with fire.

(Based on Reb Michael Treblow)

Haftorah: Melachim II 3:1-37

RIGHTS AND DUTIES

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

INSPIRATION - THE BREATH OF LIFE

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

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

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

WOMEN OF KINDNESS

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

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

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

m(Adapted from R' Shimshon Rafael Hirsch & The Midrash Says)



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

YOM ZEH MECHUBAD - scfn vz ouh
"THIS IS THE MOST PRECIOUS OF DAYS ..."

Six days shall you do your work ...
For He created all in six days

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכתך ...
כי כל עשה ששת ימים

Shayshes yamim ta'ase m'lachtecha...
cicol asa shayshes yamiim

In the Torah passage upon which this phrase is based (*Shmos* 35:2) the expression is: "Six days shall your work be done." The significance of this phrasing is understood in the light of what our Sages say (*Mesechta Berachos* 35): "When Jews do the will of Hashem their work is done for them by others." Hashem does not require our efforts. If we are deserving, He will see that our work is done for us. The reminder is that He needed no help from us in the creation that took place in the first six days of history. He will likewise see to it that when we do His will, all our needs will be taken care of without our efforts.

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