

Weekly Parsha VAYEIRA
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Wars, family dysfunction, and the danger of future extinction are the challenges that confront our father Avraham and our mother Sarah in the narrative that dominates this week's Torah reading. In this era, correcting the past and editing personal biographies to make people's lives appear perfect, serene and smooth, is especially true. This methodology attempts to make the subject character the model and prototype for others to admire and perhaps even imitate.

Who wants to have a life of troubles, frustrations, domestic strife and risk of destruction – all for the sake of a noble but very unpopular cause? So, why would the Torah not wish to at least “pretty up” the story of Avraham and his family at least by omission if not by commission? Of course the Torah is the book of absolute truth and therefore brooks none of the human weaknesses that affect all of us when dealing – even in our most objective attempt – with narratives and biographies.

The message here is that truth is the most important value and outweighs all other considerations. The Torah is determined to teach us that life, even for the greatest of people, is oftentimes difficult, disappointing and sometimes even cruel. And, that faith and commitment, goodness and morality are the supports that justify our very existence, no matter the challenges that constantly engulf human life. We are not bidden to emulate Avraham's life experiences. Rather, we are bidden to emulate his traits of belief and resilience, commitment and unwavering goodness.

We are taught that God's seal, so to speak, is truth. Truth is the gift that we ask God to grant to Yaakov and his descendants. Maimonides explains to us that we are not to serve idols, believe in superstitions and worship the dead, because all of these are false, little more than a pack of lies. And all of that is also applicable to belief in ideologies that have long lost any sense of truth, as to their goals and certainly as to their methods and policies.

Avraham sees that Sodom is to be destroyed because of its falseness. He recognizes that Avimelech cannot be trusted because he is a hypocritically false person. And Avraham reserves the right to serve the cause of God's truth even at the cost, originally, of his own life, and later that of his own beloved son. The Talmud describes our world as being “a world of falseness.” Yet knowing that we inhabit a world of falseness is the first step towards advancing into a world of honesty and truth.

That is what is meant by the biblical admonition to attempt to go in God's ways, so to speak. To be aware of the difference between falsehood and truth is the necessary ingredient for intelligent life and eternal faith. Avraham's difficulties in life point us towards the way of realism and truth. It knows no compromises or avoidances. It is therefore eternal.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion
LOOKING AT GENERATIONS
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

On my recent visit to America I availed myself of the opportunity to visit with many of my grandchildren and great grandchildren. The great grandchildren are still mainly too young to recognize me and appreciate my connection to them. As one of them so succinctly put it when he was informed that I was his zaydie: “But I already have two zaidies!” So the experience and its meaning currently is one-sided, weighted very heavily in my favor.

To paraphrase a famous cliché – it is too bad that perspective is often wasted on the old. Over the past holiday of Succot when I visited with a beloved cousin of mine spending the holiday with his children and grandchildren in Jerusalem, I realized and remarked that I now have seen seven generations in our family in my lifetime!

Growing up in the Chicago of my childhood, when most of my peers never knew their grandparents, I never imagined I would ever be able to achieve such a feat. To a certain extent, due to the grace of God and the unbelievable advances in health care in our times, there is a tendency to accept and expect to see generations in one's lifetime as a matter of course. And of course to think that way is not only a measure of ingratitude but it is a deprivation of the joy that otherwise is such a rare commodity in our lives. For we rarely are able to feel happiness, satisfaction and joy when we receive something that we feel entitled to and fully expect.

The rabbis of the Talmud have taught us that students, disciples, people that we have somehow influenced positively are considered to be our descendants. Many of us are fortunate to have biological descendants who share portions of our DNA and our physical and even mental characteristics. Both types of the above mentioned descendants are certainly influenced by us but are definitely not controlled by us or are bound by the mores of our older generation.

The later generations always live in a completely different world than did their predecessors. I am not merely speaking of a different world of technology – I was raised when there was no television, iPhones, personal computers, jet engine airplanes, Internet, fax machines, microwave ovens, etc. – but a different world of human thought and a radically dissimilar social society.

The role of government and our expectations of its abilities to ease and support our personal and financial lives have taken on the greatest dimension in our body politic. Human nature, the good and the better parts of it have never really changed over the millennia of human existence but everything else in our world certainly has changed. Understanding and appreciating this simple bald fact and dealing with the coming generations accordingly, is key to being a successful grandparent and providing meaningful guidance. No matter what, children and grandchildren may resemble or even imitate their ancestors, but they will never actually be their elders. Our constantly changing world and society simply precludes this from happening.

King Solomon wrote in Kohelet that generations depart and generations arrive yet the world remains standing and eternal. He does not mean that the world remains static and unchanging. There are certain facets of human existence on this earth – physical laws and the vagaries of human nature for example – that are constant throughout human existence. But human society and its civilizations do in fact change.

There is a concept in traditional Jewish thought that since the time of the revelation at Sinai there has been a steady decline in the potential for Torah greatness and spiritual holiness. Thus every generation is judged by its own unique spiritual and Torah potential. My grandson's generations and its achievements are therefore to be judged differently than those of the generation of my grandfather. They already surpass me in technological matters and on the operation of all of the gadgets, necessary or otherwise, of the current generation. But I would hope that their aspirations for spiritual and Torah greatness would equal that of previous generations. But because of the vastly different worlds that generations inhabit, comparative results and achievements of differing generations are really not comparable. Nevertheless, I wish them all of the blessings that only the old can bestow upon the young, that they too are privileged to see, know and love many generations in their families.

Shabbat shalom
Berel Wein

The Gemara that discusses this topic includes a reference from this week's parsha.

It's About Time
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Quiz Question #1:

Mrs. Yunger gave birth to two healthy twin boys, each of whom had his bris on the first day that halacha mandates, yet the younger Yunger had his bris several days earlier than his older brother. How can this happen?

Question #2:

Moshe Litvak asks me: "I have often wondered why my chassidische brother-in-law davens mincha after sunset, when the Mishnah Berurah rules that one should not daven this late!"

Question #3:

"My sister and I live in the same yishuv (community), and the nearest hospital is Laniado, in Netanya. She went into labor on Shabbos and left for the hospital. Immediately after Shabbos, I phoned the hospital to find out how she was and whether she had a boy or a girl, and was told by the gentile receptionist that she could not put the call through to my sister until after the time 'Rabbeinu Tam' arrives, which would not be for another half an hour. Why was the gentile receptionist so frum?"

Why Did the Younger Yunger have an Earlier Bris?

Although a bris that transpires on the eighth day of a child's life supersedes Shabbos, when a baby is born during bein hashemashos, a halachic "twilight zone" in which it is uncertain whether it is part of the previous day or the next one, his bris cannot be conducted on Shabbos. The older Yunger was born during bein hashemashos on Friday evening. Thus, his bris could not be performed on either Friday or Shabbos, and his bris was postponed to Sunday. Moreover, if one or two days of Yom Tov immediately followed Shabbos, then his bris would be delayed until after Yom Tov. However, his younger brother was born at a time that was certainly Shabbos, and therefore, his bris took place on Shabbos. Thus, younger Yunger had his bris before older Yunger.

When is Twilight?

When is bein hashemashos?

We all are aware that the Jewish date begins at night. But at what exact moment does one day end and another begin? Do we know the precise instant when one day marches off into history, and its successor arrives with its banner unfurled?

A verse in the book of Nechemiah might help resolve this question. There it describes the unenviable circumstances in which the Jews were rebuilding the Second Beis Hamikdash, while protecting themselves from the enemies who were determined to thwart its erection: And we were continuing the construction work from daybreak until the stars come out [tzeis hakoachavim] while half our men were holding spears... and at night we were on guard, while in the day we could proceed with the work (Nechemiah 4:15-16). Nechemiah implies that "night" begins when the stars emerge, and the time of dusk until they become visible is still considered the previous day (see Berachos 2b; Megillah 20b).

However, we still require more definition. Which stars? Can we pinpoint the moment that the stars come out, since the stars of the firmament do not all become visible at the same time?

Additional confusion is caused by a different verse that implies that the day ends when the sun sets, as the Torah (Vayikra 22:7) proclaims: And when the sun sets, he shall become pure, stating that the final stage of purification from some types of tumah is the sunset after immersion in a mikveh. However, at sunset no stars are yet visible. Thus, this verse implies that the changing of the day transpires at sunset, not when the stars appear (see Berachos 2b).

What a Phenomenal Dusk!

Is there any discussion in the Gemara that can "shed light" on our question? Indeed, there are several passages, and much literature is devoted to understanding them. One passage (Shabbos 34b) describes certain celestial phenomena that define when bein hashemashos begins and when it ends. The commentaries debate exactly what occurrences are being described, and, unfortunately, we derive little usable information from this passage.

When Three Stars Appear

Another passage indicates that the end of the day is determined by the appearance of stars. When one star appears, it is still day. When two appear, it is bein hashemashos, and when three appear, it is night. Not large stars that appear even in the day, and not small stars that first appear at night, but middle-sized stars (Shabbos 35b).

Now the job appears easy. Let us look at the darkening firmament this coming evening and count stars!

I am sure that there have been times when you have tried. Ever spent Shabbos on a camping trip and attempted to determine the end of Shabbos by stargazing? How did you decide which stars are considered "small," "large" and "middle-sized"? And this is assuming that one does not need to deal with light pollution!

Perhaps, locating a Gemara discussion that indicates more objective criteria, such as units of time, may be more helpful in our search to determine the end of day. Does such a discussion exist in the Gemara?

Yes, it does -- and not only one passage, but two. However, the two passages appear contradictory!

Conflicting Gemara passages

The Gemara in Pesachim (94a) states that the time between shekiyah, a word usually translated as sunset, and tzeis hakoachavim equals four mil, which we will assume is 72 minutes. (This concurs with the more obvious way of explaining the opinion of the Terumas Hadeshen [#123] and the Shulchan Aruch [Orach Chayim 459:2; Yoreh Deah 69:6 with Shach] that a mil used as a unit of time equals 18 minutes.) However, a different passage of Gemara, in Mesechta Shabbos (34b), quotes a dispute in which Rabbah states that nightfall occurs three-quarters of a mil, or 13½ minutes, after shekiyah, and Rabbi Yosef rules that it transpires a bit earlier, two-thirds of a mil, or 12 minutes, after shekiyah. Obviously, we need to explain why one Gemara states that nightfall occurs 72 minutes after shekiyah, and another states that it occurs only 12 or 13½ minutes after shekiyah!

Rabbeinu Tam's explanation

Among the many resolutions to this conundrum, the two most commonly quoted are those of Rabbeinu Tam and the Gr"a. Rabbeinu Tam contends that these two passages of Gemara are using the word "shekiyah" to refer to two different phenomena which occur about an hour apart. The Gemara in Pesachim uses the term shekiyah to mean sunset -- when the sun vanishes beyond the western horizon. Rabbeinu Tam refers to sunset as techilas shekiyah, literally the beginning of shekiyah. However, when the Gemara in Shabbos refers to "shekiyah," it does not mean sunset, but a point in time about an hour later when virtually all light of the sun's rays is dissipated from earth. Rabbeinu Tam refers to this later time as sof shekiyah, literally the end of shekiyah, and, in his opinion, until sof shekiyah occurs it is still halachically day, notwithstanding the setting of the sun and the appearance of hundreds of stars in the firmament. All these stars are considered "large stars" whose appearance does not demonstrate that the day has ended. Only at sof shekiyah does it become bein hashemashos, the time when we are uncertain whether it is day or night. At sof shekiyah, bein hashemashos has begun, meaning that now two, but not three, "middle-sized" stars are visible, and we await the appearance of the third "middle-sized" star to know that it is definitely night. (However, cf. Minchas Kohen for a variant understanding of Rabbeinu Tam's position.)

Since, according to Rabbeinu Tam, it is definitely still day until about an hour after sunset, many authorities contend that there is no problem with davening mincha considerably after sunset. (However, note that Rabbeinu Yonah understands the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam differently from what I just explained.) Thus, there are communities who base themselves on this approach and daven mincha well after sunset.

Rabbeinu Tam and a Friday night birth

According to Rabbeinu Tam, a baby born 58 minutes after sunset on Friday evening, and certainly any time earlier, was born halachically on Friday, and not on Shabbos. In Rabbeinu Tam's opinion, this baby's

bris takes place the following Friday. A baby making his appearance a bit later is considered to be born during bein hashemashos and cannot have his bris on Shabbos, because maybe bein hashemashos is still Friday -- which makes Shabbos his ninth day of life. This bris will be postponed to Sunday. However, if he is born later on Friday evening, at a time when it is definitely Shabbos, then the bris is performed on Shabbos.

It goes without saying that, according to Rabbeinu Tam, one may not perform any melacha on Saturday night until a considerable time has passed after sunset. There are various opinions as to exactly when Shabbos is definitely over according to Rabbeinu Tam, but most people assume that Shabbos is over by 72 minutes after sunset (Biur Halacha).

By the way, at this point we can answer our third question above: why the telephone lines at Laniado hospital are not open to non-pikuach nefesh related calls until more than a half hour later than the time Shabbos ends according to most calendars. The founder of the hospital, the Klausenberger Rebbe, insisted that Shabbos be observed at the hospital until it is over according to Rabbeinu Tam.

The opinion of the Gr"a

Since we know that many highly observant Jews do not wait this long for Shabbos to end, there must be another way of interpreting the two passages of Gemara that reaches a different halachic conclusion. Indeed, one such approach is presented by the Gr"a, who has a completely different way of explaining why the Gemara in Pesachim states that tzeis hakochavim does not occur until 72 minutes after sunset, whereas the Gemara in Shabbos has tzeis hakochavim occurring much earlier. The Gr"a contends that both passages use shekiyah to mean sunset, and this is the same sunset to which we customarily refer -- however, they are not referring to the same tzeis hakochavim. The Gemara passage in Pesachim that refers to tzeis hakochavim being 72 minutes after sunset means that all visible stars of the firmament can now be seen, a time that the Gr"a calls tzeis kol hakochavim, literally, when all the stars have appeared, whereas the Gemara in Shabbos refers to the time at which three "middle-sized" stars are visible. The Gr"a concludes that sunset begins the time of bein hashemashos, the time when we are uncertain whether it is day or night, with tzeis hakochavim occurring when three "middle-sized" stars are visible. The Gemara in Pesachim that requires 72 minutes until the stars appear is not discussing when the day ends -- the day ended much earlier -- but is concerned about when all remnants of sunlight vanish.

According to the Gr"a's opinion, once sunset arrives on Friday, it may already be Shabbos. We consider this time to be already bein hashemashos, and we therefore refrain from performing any melacha from this time. In the Gr"a's opinion, a baby born after sunset Friday will have his bris performed on Sunday a week later, unless he is born after three "middle-sized" stars appear, in which case his bris will be performed on Shabbos. (In practice, since we are uncertain exactly which stars are called "middle-sized," we wait a bit longer, see Biur Halacha to 393.) According to Rabbeinu Tam, this same baby would have his bris performed on Friday, unless he is born at least 58 1/2 minutes after sunset. If he is born between 58½ minutes and 72 minutes after sunset Friday evening, according to the Gr"a, his bris will be on Shabbos, whereas according to Rabbeinu Tam -his bris will be on Sunday. Rabbeinu Tam agrees that a baby born later on Friday evening will have his bris performed on Shabbos.

The Gr"a rules that one should not daven mincha after sunset, since this is already a time at which the previous day may have already passed. Thus, it is already time to daven maariv.

How do we rule?

Although in the past there were Torah communities that did not follow the Gr"a at all, even regarding the onset of Shabbos, today, it is universally accepted to consider it Shabbos from sunset on Friday. Many communities follow the Gr"a's opinion fully, and do not wait until 72 minutes after sunset on Saturday to end Shabbos. In a

responsum on the subject, Rav Moshe Feinstein took great umbrage at those in Eretz Yisroel who wait only 25 minutes after sunset to end Shabbos, contending that since a large number of Rishonim followed Rabbeinu Tam's approach, one should act stringently and not end Shabbos until at least fifty minutes after sunset, which he felt fulfills "Rabbeinu Tam time" according to the basic halachic requirement (Ighros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 4:17:26; and Orach Chayim 4:62).

Rav Shlomo Aviner

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

Financial Advice from Rabbi

Q: Should one seek a Rabbi's advice in financial matters?

A: No. He does not understand this area more than anyone else (unless he studied it). See Sefer Ha-Tanya, letter #22.

Fulfilling What The Holy One Blessed Be He Decrees

Q: How is it that we do not tell miracle stories about the truly great Rabbis but rather only about those who are not Gedolei Ha-Dor?

A: The greatest miracle is to possess proper character traits, fear of Hashem and Torah learning. A story is told about a group of Chasidim and a simple Jew. The Chasidim each related how great his Rebbe was, since whatever he decreed, Hashem fulfilled. The first said: we arrived at a river and my Rebbe decreed, and Hashem split the river. The second said: we arrived at a sea and my Rebbe decreed, and Hashem split the sea. The third said: We arrived at a mountain and my Rebbe decreed, and Hashem divided it and we walked right through it. The fourth said: it was pitch dark and my Rebbe decreed, and Hashem illuminated the entire darkness with a beam of light. The simple Jews did not say a word. They asked him about his Rebbe. He said: My Rebbe does not decree and Hashem fulfills, rather he fulfills what Hashem decreed! They all agreed that this is truly the best... (This principle is also found in the Divrei Yoel [Vayera p. 365], where the Satmar Rebbe explains that Avraham Avinu could have prayed to Hashem to nullify His request to sacrifice his son, and he would certainly have been answered, as we find in the Gemara [Moed Katan 16b]: "A Tzadik decrees and The Holy One, Blessed be He, fulfills". But Avraham Avinu did not do so, rather he went to fulfill Hashem's will. Ha-Rav Yitzchak Tuvia Weiss, Gavaad of the Eidah Ha-Charedit in Yerushalayim, notes that this is similar to what the Chafetz Chaim once said: Although it is true that "A Tzadik decrees and The Holy One, Blessed be He, fulfills" is a high level, "The Holy One, Blessed be He, decrees and a Tzadik fulfills" is an even higher level. In the book "Rabbenu Ha-Gadol Amaro" p. 159).

Shteinman = Kook

Q: I saw graffiti on a wall which said "Shteinman = Kook". What does it mean?

A: It is meant as an insult to Ha-Rav Aharon Yehudah Leib Shteinman since he does opposed certain Charedim from serving in the Charedi units in Tzahal. He is therefore compared to Maran Ha-Rav Kook. By the way, Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv once walked past this graffiti and thought it was meant as a compliment and said: Ha-Rav Shteinman is certainly a great Gadol, but not on the same level as Ha-Rav Kook... (We heard this from Ha-Rav Refael Schnorr, who is a Ra"m in our Yeshiva and the Rav of the neighborhood Maale Zeitim).

Netilat Yadayim in the Morning

Q: If I am in a place with no water, how do I Daven in the morning?

A: Clean your hands off well, recite the blessing "Al Nekiut Yadayim" (for cleaning hands – instead of "Al Netilat Yadayim") and Daven. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 4:22. When you arrive at a place with water, perform Netilat Yadayim. Aruch Ha-Shulchan 4:19.

Guarding a Member of Knesset who Desecrates Shabbat

Q: It is permissible to guard a member of Knesset who desecrates Shabbat?

A: Yes. It is a severe transgression that he violates Shabbat, but we are nonetheless obligated to protect his life (see Teshuvah of Ha-Rav

Parsha Insights

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Chain to the End of Time

This week we read the parsha of Vayera. “Vayera ailav Hashem {And Hashem appeared to him (to Avrohom)}[18:1].” Rashi explains that on the third day after his circumcision, Hashem paid Avrohom a sick call. Three angels in the guise of travelers then pass by Avrohom’s tent. Filled with zeal to perform the mitzvah of hachnosos orchim {bringing guests into one’s home} even in his debilitated state, Avrohom runs out to greet them and invites them to a his tent for a meal.

Last week we discussed a person showing pride in who he is and what he stands for. The effect that this has on others is obviously very profound. This week I’d like to discuss the very profound effect and sometimes disastrous results of not realizing the far-reaching influence we have on others.

This week’s parsha completes the ten nisyonos {tests} of Avrohom, culminating with the akeida — Avrohom’s willingness to sacrifice his son Yitzchak to Hashem. Avrohom passed and grew from all of those nisyonos, yet that is not why Hashem had such a special love for him. The Rambam writes that he would travel from city to city, ultimately spreading the then revolutionary monotheistic belief in Hashem to tens of thousands of people. Yet, that is not why Hashem had such a special love for him.

What was the cause of this special love that Hashem had for Avrohom? The passuk states very simply: “Ki y’dativ l’maan asher y’tzaveh es banav v’es baiso acharav v’shomru derech Hashem {I (Hashem) have loved him (Avrohom) because he will command his children and household after him to keep the ways of Hashem}[18:19].”

Avrohom will pass it on to others. There will be a continuity throughout the generations. A chain will be formed from him until the end of time. That’s why Hashem had that special love for him.

It follows very simply that if we are a link in that chain and we too contribute to the continuity then, to whatever degree we are involved, we will also be deserving recipients of that love from Hashem.

Very often in life, there are people we know who, at that time, seem to us to be incredibly religious. We therefore attach a lot more importance to their words than they themselves realize. They might not be aware of the responsibility that they carry.

When I was about nine or ten years old, one of the men in shul that I considered to be ‘real religious’ mentioned the following question to me in a very off-handed way. There is a slight inconsistency between what was prepared for Avrohom’s guests’ meal and what was actually served. Avrohom asked Sarah to prepare cakes, yet we don’t find that they were ever served [18:6-8]. Rashi explains that Sarah had become a nidah {menstrual staining had rendered her ritually impure}. According to the standards of ritual purity that they maintained, she was unable to serve the food that she had prepared. (Actually, these standards only halachically applied during the time of the Temple.)

This, however, seems to contradict what is written just a few verses ahead.

One of these angels informed Avrohom that in a years time, a son will be born to Sarah. The passuk then relates that Avrohom and Sarah were advanced in years and that Sarah had stopped having her menstrual periods. Sarah, thinking that they were merchant travelers who were in no position to bless her or inform her of a miracle, reacted with laughter [18:10-12].

“You know you can’t really take these things (the Torah) too seriously,” he told me in a confiding tone. He showed me those verses and explained, “If Sarah had just gotten her period, then why did she find it so hard to believe that she would have a child?” He wasn’t asking a question, he was proving his point.

That sat with me and shook me for many years — both the question itself and the fact that this guy didn’t really believe. Many years later, when I had entered Yeshiva, I did the first thing that any person should do when they have a question on Rashi. I simply looked into the Siftei Chachamim (a commentator who explains Rashi) and saw that he asks and answers the question. He explains that Sarah had a chance menstrual staining. She didn’t imagine that her full cycle and the accompanying ability to give birth had returned at her age.

A simple answer to a simple question. It’s only problematic if it’s not posed as a question but as ‘proof’ against the validity of the Torah.

In the school I attended there was a Rabbi who was at the daily prayer. If we’d put on our t’filin incorrectly, we would receive either an angry hit or yell. Anyone caught talking during prayer was sent to the side and was unable to serve as chazzan {leader} during the rest of the service.

On the morning of my bar-mitzva, I was planning to read the Torah portion. I asked someone if I should say a full or half Kaddish after I’d complete the reading. “CINER!!! TALKING!!!” Off to the side, I was banished.

When it was time for the Torah reading, I defiantly approached the bimah. “You can’t read!” I was told.

“It’s my bar-mitzva and I asked a question about the Kaddish,” I explained.

“You’re not reading!” he yelled.

“Oh yes I am!” I countered.

“The nerve of you!” he bellowed.

“The nerve of you!!!” I responded and immediately ran for my life.

Needless to say, my friends and I were not developing the most tender feelings toward prayer and our new t’filin...

Many years later, after I was already married and living in Israel, I went back home for a visit. I returned to the school for the morning prayers. While there, I saw a boy putting on his t’fillin incorrectly and watched in amazement as he was yelled at and sent off to the side. “Hey, that’s my seat,” I thought to myself. I walked over to the boy and whispered, “Don’t worry, he used to yell at me also. Here, let me show you how to put them on right.” (What a novel concept in education!) I explained that he was turning them the wrong way and showed him how to do it correctly. The kid looked at me like I was the Messiah.

After the prayers, I went over to introduce myself. He gave me a hearty greeting and told me how good it was to see me. After we had small-talked for a little while I took a deep breath. “Rabbi, there’s something I have to tell you. When I saw you yell at that young boy it reminded me how you used to yell at my friends and I. I just had to tell you that many of us didn’t wear t’filin throughout high school and you played a big role in that. I hope you’ll think about that the next time you’re about to yell at a young boy putting on his t’fillin.”

His response? “CINER!!! You used to have a lot of nerve and you still have a lot of nerve!!!” It was now his turn to make the quick exit...

Hashem’s special love for Avrohom was because he would pass things on to others in a way that would last through the generations. We each carry a tremendous responsibility to influence our children, parents, friends, co-workers, neighbors and acquaintances. Let’s not minimize or discount the profound effect we have on others. Let’s earn that special love from Hashem.

Good Shabbos,

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Blessing In Disguise

In Pashas Vayera, Sora, the 90-year-old wife of Avraham, receives a most surprising piece of information from an even more surprising source. She is told by Arab nomads, who had found obliging accommodation in Avraham’s house, that in one year she will have a child. Instinctively, she reacts in disbelief to this prediction. She laughs.

Immediately, Hashem appears to Avraham He is upset. “Why did Sora laugh? Is there something that is beyond the Almighty? At the appointed time I shall return, and behold Sora will have a son (Genesis 18:12-13).

Hashem’s ire must be explained. After all, Sora was not told by Hashem that she will have a baby. She was informed by what appeared to be Arab wanderers. And though the Talmud explains that the three nomads were indeed angels sent by the Almighty, they did not identify themselves as such. So what does G-d want from Sora?

A man once entered the small study of the revered the Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievski with a plea. “I’d like a blessing from the Rav. My daughter has been looking to get married for several years. All her friends are married and she would like to get married too, but nothing is working. Can the Rosh Yeshiva bless her to find her bashert? (appropriate one),” he asked.

The Steipler turned to the man and asked, “Is this your first daughter?”

“No,” replied the distraught parent, “Why do you ask?”

“When she was born did you celebrate with a kiddush?” (a celebratory party in a religious setting)

The man was perplexed. “No. But, that was 27 years ago,” he stammered, “and she was my third girl. I may have made a l’chayim while the minyan was leaving shul, but I never made a proper kiddush. But what does a missed kiddush 27 years ago have to do with my daughter’s shidduch (match) today?”

“When one makes a kiddush at a festive occasions,” explained Rav Kanievski, “ each l’chayim he receives is accompanied by myriad blessings. Some are from friends, others from relatives, and those blessings given by total strangers.

Among those blessings are definitely the perfunctory wishes for an easy time in getting married. By not making a kiddush for your

daughter, how many blessings did you deprive her of? I suggest you make your daughter the kiddush that she never had.”

The man followed the advice, and sure enough within weeks after the kiddush the girl had met her mate.

At the bris (circumcision) of his first son (after ten girls), my uncle, Rabbi Dovid Speigel, the Ostrove-Kalushin Rebbe of Cedarhurst, Long Island, quoted the Ramban (Nachmanides) in this week's portion.

The reason that Hashem was upset at Sora was that even if an Arab nomad gives the blessing, one must be duly vigilant to respond, “Amen.” One never knows the true vehicle of blessing and salvation. Hashem has many conduits and messengers. Some of those messengers' divinity is inversely proportional to their appearance.

We have to do is wait, listen, and pray that our prospective exalter is the carrier of the true blessing. And then, we have to believe.

Quite often, we have ample opportunities to be blessed. Whether it is from the aunt who offers her graces at a family gathering or the simple beggar standing outside a doorway on a freezing winter day, blessings always come our way. Sometimes they come from the co-worker who cheers you on at the end of a long day or the mail carrier who greets you with the perfunctory “have a nice day” as he brings today's tidings. Each blessing is an opportunity that knocks. And each acknowledgment and look to heaven may open the door to great salvation. The only thing left for us to do is let those blessings in. Good Shabbos.

Dedicated to our Beloved Mother Shirley Eskowitz – Sarah bas Reb Moshe by Marilyn & Jules Beck
Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Kalman Packouz

Emulate the Almighty -- Shabbat Shalom Vayera

Vayeira (Genesis 18:1 - 22:24)

GOOD MORNING! Have you ever fantasized on being a hero by saving someone's life? Ever imagined running into a burning building to save a child or diving into a river to rescue a drowning person? Chances are that in most of our lifetimes we'll never be presented with one of those situations. However, there is a way that you can possibly help save someone's life -- visit a sick person!

One may scoff that visiting a sick person can possibly save a life. Nonetheless, a person who doesn't have visitors may lack the necessary care required to get well or may feel depressed that no one cares. Not getting proper food, medicine or attention will hinder a person getting better; the sick person's attitude and optimism also impacts the healing process.

The Talmud (Sotah 14a) tells us that we learn the obligation to visit the sick from the commandment to emulate the Almighty. Just as the Almighty visited Avraham on the third day following his circumcision, we must visit the sick. Even though everything is dependent on God's will, we must do our part to aid a sick person and alleviate his suffering. If we do so, it is considered as if we have saved his life (Sefer Hayoshor, ch. 13).

The Shulchan Aruch, Code of Jewish Law, teaches that it is an obligation to visit the sick (Yorah Daiah 335:1). The great sage, the Chofetz Chaim, wrote that visiting the sick may be a matter of life and death. By visiting a person who is ill, you might be able to advise him of a doctor to consult or a medicine that might be worth investigating. It is especially important to visit a sick person who has no one else to take care of him. Similarly, it is important to take care for an out-of-town visitor who has taken ill. It is incumbent upon every Jewish community to have a Bikur Cholim society -- an organization to care for and look out for the sick.

The Shulchan Aruch directs close friends and relatives to visit the sick person as soon as he becomes ill; others should wait until three days have passed -- unless he is very ill, then even they should come to visit as soon as possible (Yorah Daiah 335:1). If you can't visit, then at least you should call him.

It is preferable not to visit a sick person the first and last three hours of the day. If, however, you find this difficult, you may visit him any time during the day as long as it is convenient for the person (Yorah Daiah 335:4).

There is no limit to the number of times you should visit someone who is ill. It is beneficial to visit as often as possible if your visits are welcomed and will not be a burden to the patient or cause discomfort.

It is important that the sick person enjoy the visit, so one should discuss cheerful topics. One can easily appreciate that talking about other people's illnesses, operations and deaths would be less than cheerful.

Think about what would bring joy to the sick person -- a tasty treat, a book, a game, an article he'd enjoy. Make sure that his room is neat and clean. The illustrious Rabbi Akiva visited a disciple and found the room in need of cleaning; he scrubbed the floors himself. The student attributed Rabbi Akiva's visit to saving his life!

An essential part of visiting the sick is to pray for the person's recovery. Rabbi Yosef Karo, the redactor of the Shulchan Aruch actually writes (Yorah Daiah 335) that one does not fulfill the mitzvah of visiting the sick if he does not also pray for the person's recovery. It is a mitzvah to get others to pray for a sick person. You can send your prayer requests to refuah@aish.com to have a group of 2,200 pray for someone!

There is one last benefit of your visit to a sick person. In visiting the sick, you may see how fragile and short is your own life. You may then make changes: exercising and eating more healthfully -- and in the spiritual realm: examining your own deeds and character traits and correcting them. The merit of these changes tremendously benefits the sick person

(adapted from Rabbi Zelig Pliskin's Love Your Neighbor)

Dvar Torah

based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

The Torah states:

"And (Avraham) lifted up his eyes and he saw. And behold three men were standing near him and he saw and he ran to greet them from the entrance of the tent" (Genesis 18:2).

From verse 2 until verse 8, the Torah details each specific act of Avraham's hospitality towards his guests -- "he lifted up his eyes," "he saw," "he ran to greet them." Why does the Torah spend seven verses describing the details of Avraham's kindness?

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz commented on this with an analogy. When a person inherits a house, he will usually just say, "I have a house." He will not elaborate on all of the details since he received everything at one time. However, a person who builds a house for himself will talk about every detail from the beginning until the end. He will describe how he purchased the land for the site of the house, how he bought the material that went into building the house, and so on. Each aspect is very dear to him. The more effort he put into the house, the more he will talk about it.

Similarly, said Rav Yeruchem, the actions and behavior of the righteous are like a building. With each action, a righteous person is building a great edifice. For this reason, the Torah tells us about each detail of Avraham's chesed (kindness). Every movement was another stage in the building of a righteous person.

When you view yourself as building a great person, every detail of what you do is invested with meaning and importance. Every positive action you do is creating a great human being. Keep this in mind when you do an act of kindness for others. Every movement you make is a necessary part of the entire construction. Don't wait for the end to appreciate what you are doing. Rather, feel the joy of growth in even the smallest act of kindness that you do.

Never mistake motion for action

-- Ernest Hemingway

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

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel — “For now I know that you are a God-fearing man, seeing that you have not withheld your only son from Me.” (Gen. 22:12)

The Akeda serves as a model for one of the most important questions in contemporary family life: to what extent should a parent continue to influence, direct, or channel their adult child's life? Can the power of

a parent be taken too far? Ultimately, how much control can parents continue to have in their relationships with their adult children? The Torah offers an insight to these questions in describing the immediate aftermath of the Akeda.

What happened to Isaac after the harrowing experience with his father on Mount Moriah? The Torah states, ‘So Abraham returned [singular form] to his young men [the Midrash teaches they were Eliezer and Ishmael, who accompanied them, but did not go to the actual place of the appointed sacrifice] and they [Abraham and the young men] rose up and went together to Be’er Sheva and Abraham dwelt in Be’er Sheva’ [Gen. 22:19].

Where was Isaac? Didn’t Isaac also descend from the altar and return to Be’er Sheva?

Yonatan Ben Uziel, in his interpretive Aramaic translation, writes that Isaac is not included as having returned home to Be’er Sheva because he went instead to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. In other words, prior to the Akeda, father and son magnificently joined together – ‘and they walked, the two of them, together’ (Gen. 22:6) – but afterwards, they had to part ways.

Abraham returns to his household, while Isaac returns to his books, to an academy of solitude and study. In the vocabulary of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, z”l, Abraham is the outer-directed, extroverted, aggressive Adam I, while Isaac is the more inner-directed, introverted, introspective Adam II.

In the conceptual scheme of the mystical Zohar, Abraham is the outgoing, overflowing symbol of hesed (loving kindness), while Isaac is the disciplined and courageous symbol of gevura (inner fortitude). The Akeda is both the point of unity as well as the point of departure between father and son. Isaac enters the Akeda as Abraham’s son; he emerges from the Akeda as Jacob’s father (Jacob will also study at the yeshiva of Shem and Ever).

Isaac’s commitment to God is equal to that of his father, but his path is very different. Simultaneously, the Akeda is the point of unity and separation, between father and son, for each must respect both the similarities as well as the differences within the parent-child relationship.

The commandment to circumcise one’s son is most certainly modeled on the symbol of the Akeda. After all, the basic law prescribes that it is the father who must remove his son’s foreskin (even though most fathers feel more comfortable appointing the more-experienced mohel as their agent).

From a symbolic perspective, it is the parent’s responsibility to transmit to the children the boundaries of what is permissible and what is not. Nevertheless, despite the fact that every child is a product of the nature and nurture provided by his/her parents – and the Torah teaches that a child must respect and even revere his/her parents – the existential decisions of how to live one’s life, which profession to enter and which spouse to marry are decisions which can only be made by the adult child himself/herself. [See Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, Chap. 240:25, Laws of Respecting Parents, the last comment of Rema, citing Maharik.]

We see the importance of parental restraint in the continuation of Gen. 22:12: ‘For now I know that you are a God-fearing man, seeing that you have not withheld [hasakhta] your only son from Me’ [ibid].

However, we can also understand the verse to mean, ‘For now I know that you are a God-fearing man, seeing that you have not done away with [the Hebrew h-s-kh can also mean to remove, or cause to be absent] your only son because of [My command].’

In the first reading, the angel praises Abraham for his willingness to sacrifice Isaac; in the alternative reading, Abraham is praised for his willingness not to sacrifice Isaac. [See Ish Shalom, ‘Akeda,’ Akdamot, August 1996.]

The critical lesson of the Akeda, then, is not how close Abraham came to sacrificing his own son, but rather, the limits of paternal power.

Paradoxically, when a parent enables a child to psychologically separate, the child will ultimately move forward. Isaac returns from the yeshiva to continue his father’s monotheistic beliefs and Israel-centered life. Our paramount parental responsibility is to allow our children to fulfill their own potential, and our challenge is to learn to respect their individual choices.

Shabbat Shalom

The Miracle of a Child (Vayera 5777) – Rabbi Sacks COVENANT & CONVERSATION JUDAISM & TORAH

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

The first words of God to Abraham were: “Go out from your land, your birthplace, and your father’s house . . . And I will make you a great nation . . .”

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

Two chapters later comes a third: “God took him outside and said, ‘Look at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.’ Then He said to him, ‘So shall your children be.’”

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

Four escalating promises: Abraham would be the father of a great nation, as many as the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky. He would be the father not of one nation but of many. What, though, was the reality? Early in the story, we read that Abraham was “very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.” He had everything except one thing – a child. Then God appeared to Abraham and said, “Your reward will be very great.”

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

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

This pains Abraham deeply. He pleads: “If only Ishmael might live under Your blessing.” Later, when Sarah drives Ishmael away, we read that “This distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.” Nonetheless, the decree remains. God insists that Abraham will have a son by Sarah. Both laugh. How can it be? They are old. Sarah is post-menopausal. Yet against possibility, the son is born. His name is Isaac, meaning “laughter”:

Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Finally, the story seems to have a happy ending. After all the promises and prayers, Abraham and Sarah at last have a child. Then come the words which, in all the intervening centuries, have not lost their power to shock:

After these things, God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you.”

Abraham takes his son, travels for three days, climbs the mountain, prepares the wood, ties his son, takes the knife and raises his hand. Then a voice is heard from heaven: “Do not lay a hand on the boy.”

The trial is over. Isaac lives.

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

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

Judaism is a sustained discipline in not taking life for granted. We were the people born in slavery so that we would value freedom. We were the nation always small, so that we would know that strength

does not lie in numbers but in the faith that begets courage. Our ancestors walked through the valley of the shadow of death, so that we could never forget the sanctity of life.

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

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

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

Rabbi Yissocher Frand :: Parshas Vayera

The Paradigm of Avraham Avinu

I would like to share two stories that are both related to Parshas Vayera.

The first is an article written by a first lieutenant in the Israeli Army who participated in the “Second Lebanon War” (July-August 2006):

“I remember the two weeks of near face to face combat, the confused orders, and insufficient combat gear; the intense hunger, physical and emotional exhaustion, and toughest of all the self-imposed silence and disassociation without our surroundings.”

(If you recall, this war was not very well planned. Soldiers were sent into battle without the right equipment. They did not even have proper food rations. By most accounts, it was a “failure” for the Israeli army.)

“Our attitude was ‘now is not the right time to complain but when it is all over – when the air raid sirens stop and we are out of these fatigues – we can talk and the truth will be known.’ When the news came that we were receiving a day off, our hearts soared. We suffered so much stress and hardship; where would we go? How should we take full advantage of this gift? Rumors began to circulate that we were going to some school in Migdal HaEmek. ‘This must be a joke’, I thought. ‘Who ordered 10 buses to bring us to some Yeshiva with some Rabbi who is just going to try to brainwash us?’”

“Tired and emotionally drained, we got off the buses and stood face to face with an old world looking Jew complete with white beard, side-locks, and a long jacket.”

(This Rabbi happens to be Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, also known as the ‘Disco Rabbi’; Chief Rabbi of Migdal HaEmek, founder and dean of Migdal Ohr educational institutions and a member of the Chief Rabbinate Council of Israel.)

“Here it comes, I thought, the push to put on Tefillin or to say some prayers. Some day off!”

“Boys”, the Rabbi thundered, “I suggest the first thing you do is take a dip in the pool to freshen up. In the meantime we will make you something to eat.”

(How did this story occur? The rumor got around in Northern Israel that the army needed a place for 600 soldiers to have a little R&R (Rest and Relaxation). Rabbi Grossman heard about this, he said “What’s the problem – 600 soldiers? They should all come here, of

course we have room!” This is how this battalion came to Yeshivas Migdal HaEmek.)

“With the echoes of war from the battlefield still in our ears, it seemed like a mirage or a hallucination. Soft music came from everywhere and flowing water and greenery surrounded us. Within minutes the tables were set with cold refreshing watermelon, cakes, beverages, cheeses, fresh vegetables, and soft rolls. Then we heard, ‘Out of the pool! Get dressed and eat something!’ We saw piles of new undergarments, 600 new undershirts, and underwear appeared as if out of nowhere, laid out on tables for our choosing.”

“Rabbi Grossman sat with us and laughed. Have a good time boys. Have a great time. This evening I will put on the most spectacular performance that you have ever seen.”

(Here is the line the soldier wrote that I want to emphasize.)

“I am not a religious person by any means but I cannot help but envision the first Jew, Avraham, standing and personally serving his guests, perfectly naturally without the slightest hint of condescension. He respected each individual and cared for his needs. Like Avraham, Rabbi Grossman saw this as an obvious act of kindness, a mission of a mitzvah that had fallen into his hands.”

“As the evening continued, we learned that this is the essence of who Rabbi Grossman is and what he is all about. He said, ‘Tell me friends; I heard that you are lacking different pieces of equipment. Do me a favor. Here’s paper and pencil. Just write down everything you are missing and leave the paper on the table.’ That night we enjoyed the entertainment and afterwards slept in soft beds in air-conditioned rooms. Like a fairy tale, we woke the next morning and could not believe our eyes. Mounds of gear that we desperately needed had arrived at Migdal Ohr. A small note from Rabbi Grossman said, ‘To my dear friends, with all my heart.’ Rabbi Grossman personally and immediately raised over \$60,000 worth of equipment from friends – literally overnight. The essential equipment included ceramic bulletproof vests, helmets, canteens, knee pads, backwater packs, night vision goggles, toothbrushes, socks, and more.”

As this soldier mentions, this story is in the great tradition of Avraham Avinu. Avraham Avinu suspected that the strangers before him who came to his door were idol worshippers. Rashi says on the words “wash your feet” [Bereshis 18:4] “wash off your feet from the dust of Avodah Zarah“. Yet he served them like kings. Through such activities, Avraham and Sarah were able to accumulate “the souls you made in Charan” [Bereshis 12:5], bringing thousands of people “under the wings of the Divine Presence”. It is in that tradition that people like Rabbi Grossman can make indelible impressions on even the most hardened of Israeli soldiers, who as they write further in this article “had never seen a pair of tsisis in their entire lives”.

We must try to emulate this paradigm, to accept people for what they are without being judgmental or condescending. They are Jews. We need to help them and ask questions later.

Marriages Are Dynamic Relationships

The other story I would like to share is the following:

There is a comment in a Rashi in this week’s parsha which is actually a quote from the Talmud [Bava Metziah 87a]. The pasuk [verse] says, “They said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ And he said, ‘Behold! In the tent!’” [Bereshis 18:9]. Rashi notes: “The ministering angels knew where our mother, Sarah, was, but they nonetheless asked, to make it known that she was modest, in order to endear her to her husband...”

They asked a rhetorical question, to complement Sarah in her husband’s eyes and to make her more precious to him.

Rav Wolbe, in an essay he wrote for Chasanim [grooms] asks a simple question: When someone speaks at a Sheva Brochos in front of newlyweds, he speaks of how wonderful the Chosson is and how wonderful the Kallah is in order to cement the relationship between Chosson and Kallah. However, at this point Avraham Avinu was almost 100 years old and Sarah was almost 90. It is not clear exactly at what age they got married to each other, but it was certainly many years earlier. We would think that by now either “the bride was endeared enough” to her husband or that by now nothing would help.

Rav Wolbe therefore asks, what is the point of the angels attempting to further endear Sarah to her husband by pointing out how modest she was? Furthermore, we are talking about Avraham Avinu – a Tzadik who is the pillar of the world. We do not normally associate him with romance. Therefore, what is this matter of “endearing her to her husband” that the angels were trying to accomplish?

Rav Wolbe answers that from here we see that the matter of “increasing endearment” is something which is necessary the entire lifespan of a couple! We see from this Gemara that a person can be married for 30 years, 50 years, 60 years or more but marriages are dynamic relationships and dynamic relationships need constant growth and constant renewal.

Rav Wolbe further buttresses this idea by citing the Gemara in Nida. The Gemara suggest that the whole institution of the halachic requirement of enforced separation between husband and wife during a woman’s nida period is so that the wife, when she comes back from the mikva should be “as dear to her husband as a bride who enters the marriage canopy” [Nida 31b]. One of the worst things for a marriage, Rav Wolbe points out, is boring routine (shigra). That can destroy a marriage. There must be a constant process of “to make her dearer to her husband” even for an Avraham Avinu and even for a Sarah Imeinu, no matter how many years they have been married. This is something needed in every marriage.

I want to relate a story I heard from Rav Nosson Friedman that brings out this idea. This story is originally from Rav Sholom Meir Wallach in Eretz Yisrael.

There was a Jew named Rav Dovid Hirschovitz. He was an American who went to study in the Mir Yeshiva in Europe (before World War II). After spending some time in the Mir, he came back to live his life in the United States. At some point later in his life, he went to visit Eretz Yisrael. Since he was an “old timer” from the Mir Yeshiva in Europe, he visited Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zt”l, the great Mirer Rosh Yeshiva. It could have been more than 40 years since they had seen each other.

Rav Hirschovitz had a reunion with the Rosh Yeshiva. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz greeted him warmly. He hugged him and kissed him. He was so happy to see him. They renewed old times. Rav Chaim said he wanted to invite him to his house for lunch. He checked with his wife and brought his guest home for lunch.

At the meal, Rav Chaim acted in what Rav Hirschovitz thought was a very strange manner. When Rav Chaim first walked into the house he asked his wife “What are you serving for lunch?” She said “I am serving chicken and rice”. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, the great Rosh Yeshiva, the great maggid shiur, the great Baal Mussar sat down to eat the chicken and rice. He gobbled up the chicken and rice, leaving only bones on the plate. He literally cleaned his plate. He asked his wife, “What kind of spices did you use in this rice? It is delicious!” She told him and he asked for another portion. She brought out another portion of the rice which he quickly finished off. Again he said “So, geshmak! Really delicious!”

Rav Hirschovitz could not believe what happened to the great Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. After Mrs. Shmuelevitz left the room and was out of earshot, the guest said to Rav Chaim “What happened to you? In the Mir in Europe you were so involved in learning. The only thing you thought about day and night was Torah learning to the extent that

people had to remind you to eat!” When you ate, people had to remind you to bentsh because you forgot that you ate.

[Someone once told me that on Chanukah, after Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz lit the candles, he said HaNeiros Halalu, but he did not sing Maoz Tzur, because singing Maoz Tzur was only a ‘minhag’ [custom] and he was prepared to forego the minhag so that he could go back to learn right away. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz was that type of masmid [diligent student]. We look at Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz as a Gaon Olam (world-class genius) which he was, but he was also an exceptional masmid.]

However, forty years later Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz was asking about the recipe for the rice and cleaning his plate! Rav Hirschovitz could not understand it.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz told him, “You should know, I am the best maggid shiur [lecturer in Talmud] in Eretz Yisrael. This is not bragging. I worked on these shiurim for forty years. I said these shiurim in the Mir in Europe and in Shanghai. I worked over, refined, sifted, and resifted these shiurim so much. These shiurim are gold! Yet, after I say a shiur, when a 17-year-old bochur says to me, “Rebbe that was a good shiur” – that makes my day! What does a 17-year-old boy know? He does not begin to grasp all the questions resolved by my presentation and the clarity accomplished by my approach to the Talmudic passage. Yet, his complement makes me feel good, because that is human nature.

“This lunch,” he told his guest “is my wife’s shiur“. This is what she lives for – to take care of me. Therefore, to make her feel good, I eat what she provides me with relish and with gusto. I clean my plate to eat up every morsel of what she provides. I did not become a glutton. This is her shiur and I want to show her that I appreciate it.

This is the idea of “to endear her to her husband”. This story of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz took place when he was already an older man. He must have been married for more than 50 years. However, every wife and every person needs a complement regardless of how long they have been married.

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
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***Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayera
For the week ending 19 November 2016 / 18 Heshvan 5777
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights***

A Square Meal

***“So Avraham hastened to the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Hurry!’
(13:17).***

Rabbi Leib Chasman once joined the saintly Chafetz Chaim for a Friday night meal in Radin. Rather than starting the meal with singing “Shalom Aleichem” as was his custom, the Chafetz Chaim immediately recited Kiddush and commenced the meal forthwith, and only then started “Shalom Aleichem”.

Rabbi Chasman could not contain his curiosity, and asked the Chafetz Chaim why he had changed his practice, to which the Chafetz Chaim answered: “You travelled a great distance today. You must certainly be very hungry, and so I wanted to serve you first. The angels — to whom we recite the Shalom Aleichem — aren’t hungry, and can wait a little”.

“So Avraham hastened to the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Hurry!’”

Avraham is the paradigm of hospitality. The Torah is teaching us here that an essential part of hospitality requires us to serve guests immediately. The Talmud (Ta’anit 21) relates that Nachum Ish Gamzu once delayed feeding a pauper while he took off the pack from his donkey’s back, and in the meantime the pauper fainted from hunger.

And even in our days, convenience stores and boiled sweets don't make up for a square meal.

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OU Torah

Vayerah: Quiet Strength

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb

The election season is finally over. Whether we are disappointed with the results or gladdened by them, we unanimously breathe a sigh of relief that the campaign has concluded. We are especially appreciative of the fact that we no longer have to hear grandiose promises expressed by each candidate, promises that we all know will not be kept.

The tendency which many of us have, even those of us who are not candidates for political office, to speak of our intentions in exaggerated terms, runs counter to a principal value of our religion. I speak of a value which is exemplified by Abraham in this week's Torah portion, Parshas Vayerah (Genesis 18:1-22:24).

You remember the story. Abraham is "sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing near him... Bowing to the ground, he said, 'My lords, if it pleases you... bathe your feet and recline under the tree. And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves...'" The three men consented to Abraham's offer.

But does Abraham merely fetch them a morsel of bread? No. He hastens into the tent to Sarah and instructs her to bring three seahs of choice flour and to bake cakes. Then he has the servant boy prepare a tender and choice calf, and added curds and milk to the menu. The biblical passage concludes with these words: "He set these before them, and waited on them under the tree as they ate."

The Talmud (Bava Metzia 87a) notes the contrast between Abraham's initial modest offer of a simple morsel of bread with the grand feast that he ultimately delivered. The Talmud comments, "This is the way of the righteous. Omrim me'at ve'osim harbeh. They say little, but do much."

In this passage, the rabbis describe the value of "saying little, but doing much" as a value practiced by the righteous, but not by every man. It is only "the way of the righteous."

Yet we find another passage in rabbinic literature which urges all of us to "say little and do much". I refer to the statement of Shammai in the very first chapter of Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers. There Shammai says: "Make your Torah study a fixed habit. Say little and do much; and greet everyone cheerfully."

Although it is Shammai's arch opponent, Hillel, who is known for his humane approach to interpersonal relationships, apparently Shammai too was humane and sensitive to the needs of others. Although he begins his words of counsel by emphasizing the importance of regular Torah study, he fully recognizes the need say little, do much, and act cheerfully. Note too that he does not restrict his advice to the righteous. Quite the contrary. The words of Pirkei Avot apply to us all. They are to be heeded even by those of us who are not numbered among the righteous. We are all to say little and do much.

What precisely did the rabbis mean when they said, "Say a little, but do much"? I think that many are confused by similar phrases found in a variety of secular contexts. For example, there is the phrase "the strong, silent type." This phrase conjures up the old cinema images of Gary Cooper and John Wayne. These actors came to typify "macho" men who did not waste their time with idle chatter, but who were "doers". These were men who acted decisively and often violently but "got things done". This is surely not what the rabbis had in mind when they advocated "speaking little, but doing much".

Another similar adage that comes to mind is "Speak softly, but carry a big stick." These words are associated with the foreign policy of President Theodore Roosevelt, who believed in quiet diplomacy backed up by the threat of military might. It is quite possible that the rabbis would have seen the advantages of such a foreign policy, but "carrying a big stick" was certainly not their moral message.

To accurately understand what the rabbis were trying to convey. I find it useful to turn to the words of my favorite commentary on Pirkei Avot, the one written by Rabbenu Yonah, Rabbi Jonah of Gerona, the 13th century ethicist who lived in Catalonia, Spain. Here is his comment upon Shammai's Emor me'at ve'aseh harbeh:

"When you promise your fellow to do something for him, promise him but a little, but then do as much as you can for him. This is the way of ethics, and this is the way of piety." Ethics demand that one keep his promises. It is proper to promise only that which one can confidently guarantee to deliver. Piety demands that one act with great humility and promise only small things, to be followed if possible with pious generosity going far beyond the initial commitment."

Rabbenu Yonah then continues with another aspect of "Say little, but do much." He calls it the quality of *elyonut*, of superiority. If I understand him correctly, Rabbenu Yonah alludes to the superior power that is gained by "saying little and doing much." It is the power that is possessed by the modest person who acts bravely and courageously.

I came across an excellent example of this superior power when I recently read Susan Cain's book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. For me, the word "introvert" is just a modern way of describing the person who "says little but does much."

In the opening pages of her book, Cain tells the story of Rosa Parks, the African American woman who, during the days when buses were still segregated in the deep South of the United States, defied the bus driver who ordered her to yield her seat to a white person. She simply said, "No." With that one word, she was able to galvanize her community to come to her support, and she ultimately achieved equality for her people.

Obituaries described her as "timid and shy, but with the courage of a lion." The title of her autobiography is "Quiet Strength." It was her quiet nature that gave her the superior power which culminated in great strength. I think that this is what Rabbenu Yonah meant when he referred to the superior effectiveness, the "doing much," which comes as a consequence of "saying little."

In our day and age, when people make promises with braggadocio and fanfare but fail to keep those promises, the advice of our rabbis is especially relevant. When alluring words are not followed by effective and beneficial actions, the advice of our rabbis is not only relevant, but urgent.

We all must work toward establishing a society that is guided by the words of Shammai and the actions of Abraham. We must learn to promise only a "morsel of bread" but serve "cakes and calves" and a feast fit for kings.

Emor me'at v'aseh harbeh. "Say a little, but do a lot."

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Lessons From the Aftermath of the Akeida

Immediately following akeidas Yitzchak the Torah tells us that Avraham rejoins those who had accompanied him on his journey to the akeida. There are two difficulties with this epilogue. First, there is no mention of Yitzchak returning, which leads us to wonder where he

was after the akeida. Second, why is it significant that Avraham returns to those who initially traveled with him?

There are two important lessons that we learn from Avraham's return and Yitzchak's seeming lack of return. Chazal comment that Yitzchak did in fact not return home, but rather traveled to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever to study Torah. Why was the place of Torah study the next destination for Yitzchak after experiencing the akeida?

There are countless references in Tanach and Chazal to the relationship between the Beis HaMikdash and talmud Torah. The Mishkan, and later the Beis HaMikdash, housed the luchos which were the representation of the entire Torah. The Sanhedrin that embodies the mesorah sat in the Beis HaMikdash. Our tefillos at the end of every Shemoneh Esrei conclude with the words "May You rebuild the Beis HaMikdash and grant us our share in Your Torah." Echoing the words of Yeshayahu, "From Tzion will come forth Torah and Hashem's word from Yerushalayim," the Rambam in the end of Hilchos Melachim describes the days of Moshiach as being a time of unprecedented Torah study. "The world will be full of knowledge of Hashem", as prophesized by Yeshayahu, and this will accompany the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash.

The connection between Torah study and Mikdash reflects the basic nature of both. The purpose of the Mikdash is to enable the Shechina to dwell in our midst. It is precisely this Divine Presence that is also an essential component of talmud Torah. Chazal teach us that anytime and anyplace that Torah is studied, Hashem's Presence is there. At the conclusion of the akeida the future location of the Beis HaMikdash was designated. Although not physically offered as a korban, Yitzchak had been consecrated as one. As such, he had to maintain a level of sanctity befitting a korban. Yitzchak was therefore searching for a location where he could continue to bask in Hashem's Presence, and there was no greater place to do so than the yeshiva of Shem and Eiver.

Yitzchak's actions following the akeida speak to every one of us this time of the year. We all experienced the Divine Presence during the recent yomim tovim. Although we did not yet merit the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash, we did come closer to Hashem during the Yomim Noraim and Succos season. Now that the month of Tishrei and its great spirituality is behind us, where do we go to maintain the proximity to Hashem's Presence that we attained during that period? Yitzchak's behavior is very instructive. The only way to continue our relationship with Hashem is through the vehicle of Torah study. We go back to the beis medresh and thereby reinforce everything we accomplished in the "House of Hashem" during the yomim tovim.

Avraham's actions following the akeida also contain a critical lesson for us, particularly following the great spiritual heights of the past month. Although Avraham had just passed the monumental test of the akeida, he did not display any haughtiness toward others who had not done so. He accompanied his fellow travelers without drawing attention to his great accomplishments.

We daven that Hashem should remove the Satan from in front of us and from behind us - "v'hoseir Satan milifneinu u'm'l'achareinu". The Chofetz Chaim explained this phrase to refer to the two challenges that we face as we try to attain spiritual heights. There are obstacles we must overcome that can prevent us from attaining greatness in Torah and avodas Hashem. After we succeed, we are faced with another challenge: we may become arrogant about our accomplishments and look down at those around us. We therefore beseech Hashem to help us follow the example of Avraham who was able to return from the akeida without the feeling of arrogance notwithstanding his great accomplishments. We should be proud of what we accomplished during the month of Tishrei. Yet, this should never result in an arrogance that causes us to look down at others. As the yom tov season is behind us, let us rededicate ourselves to talmud Torah in a spirit of humility befitting the descendants of Avraham and Yitzchak.

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The Times of Israel
The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Vayera: Bad Examples
Wednesday, November 16, 2016/ Heshvan 15, 5777

We are too quick to imitate depraved examples. –Juvenal

The ancient biblical city of Sodom was considered particularly evil. God eventually decides to destroy the city and almost all of its inhabitants. However, before He does so, He notifies our patriarch Abraham. What then ensues is a surreal haggling between God and Abraham as to how many righteous people in Sodom it would take to save the city.

Abraham starts the bidding at fifty people and God agrees. Abraham quickly lowers the bid to forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty and finally ten. God agrees to each of Abraham's offers. Abraham stops at ten, apparently understanding that he can't ask for less than ten righteous people to save Sodom. It turns out there aren't even ten. Sodom is subsequently destroyed in a dramatic telling in Genesis Chapters 18 and 19.

Rabbi Hirsch on Genesis 18:1 wonders as to why God informs Abraham of His plans and enters into the bizarre negotiation. Rabbi Hirsch explains that God wanted Abraham to understand and be aware of the evil of Sodom so that Abraham's descendants should never become like the people of Sodom. They should beware of the horrendous example of those people.

However, the episode also demonstrates Abraham's love of humanity. It didn't matter to him how despicable the Sodomites were. They were human beings created in the image of God and he would make every reasonable effort he could, even arguing with God, to save them. Abraham was not an isolationist looking out exclusively for his own interests. He did look out for his family and allies first, but he did not turn a blind eye to the suffering of others.

May we surround ourselves with and look up to good examples.

Shabbat Shalom
Dedication - To the memory of Leonard Cohen. His music reached and inspired many.
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Balancing Prayer and Torah

Our time is limited. How much time should we devote to prayer, and how much to Torah study? Which activity is more important?

We find the Talmudic sages Rava and Rav Hamenuna debated this issue:

“Rava saw Rav Hamenuna praying at length. He remarked to his colleague, ‘You neglect chaye olam [eternal life, i.e., Torah study] and occupy yourself with chaye sha’ah [temporal life — prayer]!’

Rav Hamenuna, however, disagreed. He argued that there is a time for prayer, and there is a time for Torah study.” (Shabbat 10a)

Why did Rava say that prayer is only chaye sha’ah, of temporal value? And what exactly was Rav Hamenuna's defense for spending so much time in prayer, at the expense of his Torah studies?

Mind and Heart

Rashi explains that prayer is chaye sha’ah since we pray for worldly concerns — for health, peace, and livelihood. Yet this explanation is

not fully satisfactory, since we also pray for spiritual aspirations, such as wisdom, forgiveness, and redemption.

According to Rav Kook, the terms *chayei olam* and *chayei sha'ah* refer to the essential difference between these two paths of serving God. Torah study provides us with new knowledge from the source of truth. Since it is based on our intellectual efforts to uncover eternal, unchanging truths, Torah is *chayei olam* — of eternal value.

While Torah enriches the mind, prayer targets the heart. Prayer does not supply us with new knowledge and understanding. It utilizes our emotional faculties to deepen the impact of ethical teachings and Torah wisdom on the soul. Prayer does not seek out new truths; it aspires to internalize truths already acquired. Since prayer relates to the more volatile aspects of human nature — emotions and feelings which fluctuate over time — the Sages referred to prayer as *chayei sha'ah* — a Divine service which relates to temporal life.

Furthermore, it is precisely those images which are not intellectually rigorous that are able to engage and stir our emotions. Since our emotional faculties are closer to our physical side, they have difficulty relating to the abstract concepts of the intellect. They require the assistance of more concrete images. Therefore, in prayer we are permitted to utilize descriptions of God — mental images of a loving Father or a revered King, for example — in recognition of their powerful impact on the emotions.

In summary, the terms *chayei olam* and *chayei sha'ah* refer to the nature of the human faculty engaged. Torah study is based on eternal truths and utilizes our powers of reason and logic. Prayer, on the other hand, reaches out to the lower and more volatile aspects of the human psyche. For this reason, Rava criticized Rav Hamenuna's lengthy prayers, since they came at the expense of the eternal value of Torah study. "You neglect eternal life and occupy yourself with temporal life."

A Time for Prayer

Rav Hamenuna did not contest Rava's evaluation of the relative merits of Torah study and prayer. His reply was based on an understanding that each of these two forms of Divine service has its own place.

The Sages taught an important axiom regarding Torah study: "One should always study that which one's heart desires" (Avodah Zarah 19a). The rabbis recognized that our inner inclination will lead us to the proper path. If we are drawn to a particular area of Torah, this is a sign that the state of our soul currently requires spiritual sustenance from this aspect of Torah.

This principle is also valid when seeking the correct balance between Torah and prayer. The intellect is not fully capable of judging how much we should nourish ourselves from the wellsprings of Torah wisdom, and how much we need to add the 'spices' of emotion and feeling. Here, too, our inner inclination will guide us appropriately.

When we are drawn to Torah study, then this is "the time for Torah" — the staple for spiritual advance for the individual and society as a whole. But if we feel from within a hunger for the holy experience of authentic prayer, a yearning to pour out our soul before God, then this is a sign that our soul currently requires this form of spiritual service.

The Sages established set times for prayer. This standard meets the religious needs of most people. But this 'factory setting' may be adjusted to meet one's specific spiritual needs. This understanding of how we fine-tune the balance between prayer and Torah study is the crux of Rav Hamenuna's response, "There is a time for prayer, and there is a time for Torah."

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The Times of Israel

The Blogs :: Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

Chesed – Acts of Loving Kindness

Thursday, November 17, 2016/ Heshvan 16, 5777

Imagine this scene:

A gentleman, along in years, sits on the porch of his house on a warm, summer's day. The sun is high in the sky. Perhaps the man, drowsy with the afternoon heat, begins to close his eyes for a brief nap. But a noise startles him. He looks up. A car coming down the road stops and three men climb out, clearly lost and in need of direction. They look around before seeing the man on the porch...

What happens next?

In our "don't talk to strangers" society, it is possible to imagine the older man already reaching for his cell phone, ready to dial 9-1-1. Popular culture has "cued us" to suspect that these men clearly pose an imminent danger to the man. At the very least, he should retreat into his house. And lock the door!

But what does he do? He runs from his porch to the street and he greets them warmly. Not only that, he invites them into his house and has his wife provide food to them!

While jarring set in a modern setting, this is exactly what Avraham Avinu did in welcoming the three strangers into his tent. Despite recovering from his *bris*, he did not sit passively while the men approached. He ran to them, as if anxious to demonstrate his hospitality toward them.

Likewise, in interceding with God for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah, Avraham Avinu insinuated himself in the midst of unsavory people, in a dangerous, unstable situation. And to what purpose? To try and find a peaceful and righteous solution, to save a community to which he did not belong.

To help.

To perform *chesed*.

In performing these acts of *chesed*, Avraham Avinu demonstrated by example how we are to behave in the world, how loving-kindness is to imbue our actions and behavior each day of our lives. Rav Moshe of Kobrin, taught that "A day that a Jew does not do a kindness is not considered a day in his life."

Such a sentiment suggests that, like Avraham Avinu, it is not enough to passively not do the wrong thing; rather, it is necessary to proactively seek out opportunities to do the right thing. That is, we are not to sit before our tents until strangers come to us but we are to run from before our tents to find ways to demonstrate our loving-kindness. It is, after all, as essential to a Jewish life as eating and praying.

We are to emulate Avraham Avinu.

God was well aware of the degree of *chesed* obtained by Avraham. He was cognizant of Avraham's constant desire to reach out and aid others.

But on the day that he extended such generous hospitality to the three strangers, Avraham had earned a rest.

Our tradition teaches that, on the third day after Avraham's *bris* at the age of 99, God turned the weather unnaturally warm, in order to make it impossible for Avraham to tend to the needs of others. Having fulfilled the *mitzvah*, the heat caused him to feel ill and weak. He was unable to do anything other than sit before his tent and heal.

Mind you, there were countless reasons to excuse Avraham from extending himself to others; after all, he was recuperating from performing his own bris. At 99!

Who would not have “forgiven” him had he chosen to take some “time off” from performing acts of chesed? No one. Except, perhaps, Avraham himself. For Avraham, there was no excuse not to “do for others.” Avraham could simply not accept a “reality” where there were no guests to tend to, no passers-by to feed, no one to welcome and assist.

It was torment for Avraham to sit before his tent. Not due to the bris but due to his inability to do what came naturally to him, to perform acts of loving-kindness, to engage in chesed. God saw his torment and, taking pity on Avraham, God sent the three angels, in the form of men, for Avraham to welcome and assist.

But why couldn't Avraham simply relax? Why couldn't he simply relinquish the doing of loving deeds for even a short while?

Rav Michel Birnbaum offers an explanation in his *Sichos Mussar*. “Our notion of chesed, loving-kindness, is to respond and give when there is a need; give to the poor, tend to the sick, counsel the troubled, comfort the mourner, feed the hungry. In other words, to be responsive to the troubled human condition when called upon, when the need is there staring at us. When we behave in this way, we consider ourselves ba’alei chesed, kind, considerate, giving.”

If the needs of others do not “enter our consciousness”; if they do not announce themselves; if we are so deeply entrenched in our own concerns, then certainly we are exempt from being ba’alei chesed, are we not?

Would we not be justified in doing nothing under these conditions? Could we not truthfully say, “But I did not know?”

Perhaps.

But if we did, we would not be following Avraham Avinu’s model. In Avraham’s life, chesed was not incidental. It was not performed when the need “revealed itself.” Rather, Avraham’s actions teach us that a true ba’al chesed actively seeks out the opportunity to perform acts of loving-kindness.

Failing to do so leaves him tormented and troubled.

Micah proclaims, “What does HaShem require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness?” It is what we are called to do in our lives. If there is no one in need within our field of vision, we are called upon to widen our field of vision. Like Avraham, we must run to those in need, seeking out the opportunity to perform chesed.

If I sit before my tent and gaze out at the world and see no chesed that needs to be done, it is not because all is right with the world but because there is something lacking in me.

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Ohr Somayach Talmud Tips Bava Metzia 51 - 57
by Rabbi Moshe Newman
For the week ending 19 November 2016 / 18 Heshvan 5777

“The laws of ‘ona’ah’ (unfair pricing in a sale) do not apply to a sale of land.” — Mishna 56a

The Torah states: And when you make a sale to your fellow Jew or make a purchase from the hand of your fellow Jew, you shall not wrong (“al tonu”) one another. (Vayikra 25:14)

This verse teaches that there is a prohibition against taking advantage of either a buyer or seller when conducting a business transaction. The words “al tonu”, which are translated here as “do not wrong”, more literally mean “do not oppress” or “do not take advantage of”. This is a Torah prohibition against what is known as “price-gouging”.

However, our mishna limits this prohibition to the sale of a movable object, but that it does not apply to the sale of land. The gemara explains that this distinction is seen in the word “m’yad” — “from the hand” — which implies that only objects that are “acquired from hand to hand” (movables) are included in this prohibition. Stationary land, on the other hand, is not part of the prohibition, as taught in the mishna.

Having said this, Rav Nachman states in our gemara that whenever there is ona’ah involving land, although there is no Torah prohibition, the sale is nevertheless invalid as a “mekach ta’ut” since there was excessive cheating involved. Tosefot, however, questions this ruling, since it seemingly contradicts another ruling made by Rav Nachman later in our masechta. On daf 108a Rav Nachman states that if a person sells land worth 100 for 200, the sale is indeed valid since ona’ah does not apply to land. So, it appears that when land is involved, not only is there no prohibition, but that the transaction is valid as well.

Tosefot cites an answer to reconcile these two rulings of Rav Nachman by a principle that Rabbeinu Tam proposes. When the price-gouging in the sale of land is up to double its value, the sale is valid, as in the case on 108a. However, if the cheating is more than double, the sale of the land is invalid. In other words, although there is no prohibition when transacting land for an exorbitant price, the sale is invalid if the price paid is more than double. The Torah appointed our Rabbinical Sages to determine the amount at which point the sale is invalid, and they set this price at anything more than double.

(This is the ruling of other Rishonim as well, and is the halacha according to the Rema in Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 227:29. Other Rishonim disagree with the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam, and rule that not only is there never a prohibition of ona’ah when dealing with land, but the sale is always valid, irrelevant of the extremely high price paid. See Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 227:29 for more details and discussion.)

Bava Metzia 57a

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In dedication of Mr. Emilio Goldstein ע"ה