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subject: Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Avraham's Relationship with Those Around Him

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Avraham's Relationship with Those Around Him

Last week's parsha concluded with Avraham's name being changed to Avraham. His new name represented his role as a father for the entire world.

Throughout the parshios of Lech Lecha, Vayera, and Chayey Sarah that deal with the events of Avraham's lifetime, the Torah records many interactions that Avraham had with leaders and members of other nations. Avraham is accorded great respect and admiration from the leading personalities of his time. He is blessed by Melchizedek, sought after by Avimelech to enter into a treaty, and referred to as a prince of Hashem by the tribe of Efron when negotiating purchasing a burial plot for Sarah. What was it about Avraham that won him the honor and respect from his contemporaries?

Chazal comment that the title Avraham HaIvri not only describes his birthplace as being ever Inahar (the other side of the river) but also refers to Avraham being distinct from the rest of humanity. His values and behavior were "on the other side of the river" from the rest of the world. Not only did Avraham not espouse the values of those around him, he challenged those who subscribed to idolatry and those who sanctioned unethical behavior. Chazal relate to us the story that occurred during Avraham's youth when he smashed the idols that led to his fleeing from Ur Kasdim. He confronts Avimelech in Parshas Vayera and informs him that Avimelech's own servants are guilty of stealing Avraham's wells. Someone who lives up to a higher ethical and spiritual standard than others and also attempts to correct others is usually met with animosity. How did Avraham's behavior not only not earn the scorn of those around him, but also win their admiration and respect?

The secret to Avraham's success with his contemporaries was that they realized that he truly cared about them. Notwithstanding his absolute belief that idolatry had no place in the world, he cared even about the idol worshippers themselves. His tent was open to all and Chazal teach us that he treated the three angels royally even though he thought that they worshipped the sand of the desert. His care for all did not minimize his attitude towards

idolatry and he insisted that they wash their feet and remove the sand before entering his tent. Once they did, he served them with love hoping to show them the proper path to avodas Hashem. The inhabitants of Sodom lived in a way that was antithetical to everything that Avraham held dear. Yet, when told of the imminent destruction that would befall them, Avraham interceded on their behalf. When one is perceived by others to be self-centered and arrogant because of one's higher spiritual standards, envy and eventually hatred of that person will result. However, if the righteous individual truly cares for others, he will not only be tolerated, but he will be respected and admired. Those around him will realize that his correcting of others does not stem from arrogance, but rather from a genuine care and concern for the welfare of all.

We often find ourselves in situations in which we have to subscribe to a higher ethical and religious standard than many of those around us. It is critical to never be aloof and uncaring, even of those whose actions and beliefs we do not approve of. We should never compromise our standards to win the favor of others, rather we should relate to others in a kind and caring manner. By bringing honor and respect to our values and actions, we are truly magnifying the honor and respect of Hashem Who expects us to live a life of emulating the values and actions of Avraham Avinu. Copyright © 2018 by TorahWeb.org. All rights reserved.

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PARENTING

Vayeira: God and Strangers

Britain's Former Chief **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

October 24, 2018

Covenant & Conversation:

Family Edition is a new and exciting initiative from Written as an accompaniment to Rabbi Sacks' weekly Covenant & Conversation essay, the Family Edition is aimed at connecting older children and teenagers with his ideas and thoughts on the parsha. Each element of the Family Edition is progressively more advanced; The Core Idea is appropriate for all ages and the final element, From The Thought of Rabbi Sacks, is the most advanced section. Each section includes Questions to Ponder, aimed at encouraging discussion between family members in a way most appropriate to them. We have also included a section called Around the Shabbat Table with a few further questions on the parsha to think about. The final section is an Educational Companion which includes suggested talking points in response to the questions found throughout the Family Edition.

The Parsha in a Nutshell

God appears to Abraham. Three strangers pass by. Abraham offers them hospitality. One of them tells Abraham that Sarah will have a child. Sarah, overhearing, laughs in disbelief.

God then tells Abraham of His plan to punish the people of Sodom. Abraham enters into an unprecedented discussion with God about justice, demanding He take into account any possible innocent people in Sodom. God agrees that if there are ten innocent men in the city He will spare it. Two of the visitors, by now identified as angels, go to Abraham's nephew, Lot, in Sodom and rescue him, his wife and their daughters from the destruction. Eventually, the promised child, Isaac, is born to Sarah. The parsha ends with the great test of the Akeidah, the "binding of Isaac."

The Core Idea

Our parsha begins with a somewhat confusing opening scene, with Abraham sitting at the entrance to his tent:

God appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three

men were standing over against him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent entrance, and bowed down to the earth... (Gen. 18:1-2) At first glance the story seems simple. However, after a closer look it is actually complex and ambiguous. It consists of three sections:

Verse 1: God appears to Abraham.

Verses 2-16: Abraham meets the men/angels.

Verses 17-33: The dialogue between God and Abraham about the fate of Sodom.

The relationship between these sections is far from clear. Is this one scene, two or three?

The most obvious possibility is three. Each of the sections is a separate event. First, God appears to Abraham, as Rashi explains, “to visit the sick” after Abraham’s circumcision (brit milah). Then the visitors arrive with the news that Sarah will have a child. Then the great conversation between Abraham and God about justice and the punishment of the people of Sodom. The Rambam suggests that there are only two scenes: The visit of the angels, and the dialogue with God. The first verse does not describe an event at all; it is, rather, a chapter heading. It tells us that the events that follow are all part of a prophetic communication from God, a divine-human encounter.

The third possibility is that we have a single continuous scene. God appears to Abraham, but before He can speak, Abraham sees the passers-by and asks God to wait while he serves them food. Only when they have departed – in verse 17 – does he turn to God, and the conversation begins.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

Which of these three interpretations do you think best explains the story?

Why do you prefer that interpretation to the others?

Consider the third interpretation. What do you think of Abraham’s decision to interrupt his conversation with God? Was it justified? Can that behaviour ever be justified?

What do you think is the message behind the third interpretation?

It Once Happened...

Ari Fuld deserved his nickname the “Lion of Zion”. He was a brave and passionate Zionist and dedicated his life to the Jewish People and to the Jewish State. Ari served in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) as a sergeant in an elite paratroopers’ unit, and felt it was a privilege to serve in the IDF. When he turned 40, his discharge papers arrived but he tore them up and refused to retire. In his civilian life he continued his life’s work to advocate for Israel in the media and on social media, and support IDF troops through the organisation he helped create and run called Standing Together. Ari was killed one Sunday morning in a knife attack while doing his supermarket shopping in September 2018. After fatally stabbing Ari, the terrorist continued his attack, running toward a woman serving falafel in a nearby shop. With a superhuman effort, with his very last breaths, Ari jumped over a wall and chased the terrorist, shooting him before he could kill again. Ari then collapsed and died from his wounds. He died as he lived. A hero dedicated to the Jewish people.

Ari’s true heroism and character became well-known following his death as stories from his life began to surface. A particularly poignant one came from a local Arab who reached out to Ari’s family to offer his condolences. He told them that every Friday when Ari would shop for his own family for Shabbat, he would also buy some extra food to give to his family who were poor and often hungry. While Ari dedicated his life to his own people, he had compassion and love for the stranger also.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

What do you find most inspiring from this story?

Is it hard to show kindness to the stranger? Why is it important?

Thinking More Deeply

In “The Core Idea” we saw three possible interpretations of the story of the angels visiting Abraham. These options hinge upon the way we translate the word Adonai in Abraham’s appeal: “Please Adonai, if now I have found

favour in your sight, do not pass by, I pray you, from your servant” (18:3). Adonai can be a reference to one of the names of God. But it can also be read as “my lords” or “sirs.” In the first case, Abraham would be addressing God. In the second, he would be speaking to the passers-by. In fact, an example of the second way to read the term Adonai, as “my lords” can be seen in the very next chapter (Gen. 19:1-2), when Lot receives two of the same angels in Sodom. The simplest reading of both stories would be to read the word consistently as “sirs” and many English translations do just that. Jewish tradition, however, does not.

We know this because there are halachic implications in this case of how we read this word. If we read Adonai as “God,” it is a holy name, and both the writing of the word by a scribe, and the way we treat a parchment or document containing it, have special stringencies in Jewish law. And that is how Jewish law rules in this case.

This is an extraordinary fact, because it suggests that Abraham actually interrupted God as He was about to speak, asking Him to wait while he attended to the visitors. The story must now be read like this: God appeared to Abraham, and then he also noticed three men approaching. Abraham then turned to God and said “My God, if I have found favour in Your eyes, do not leave Your servant [i.e. Please wait until I have given hospitality to these men].” Then Abraham turned back to the men and offered his hospitality. This daring interpretation became the basis for a principle in Judaism: “Greater is hospitality than receiving the Divine Presence” (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 127a). Faced with a choice between listening to God, and offering hospitality to strangers, Abraham chose the latter. God accepted his request and waited while Abraham brought the visitors food and drink, before engaging him in dialogue about the fate of Sodom.

How could Abraham put the needs of [who he thought to be] human beings before God? This passage is teaching us a profound truth. The idolaters of Abraham’s time worshipped the sun, the stars, and the forces of nature as gods. They worshipped power and the powerful. Abraham knew, however, that God is not in nature but beyond nature. There is only one thing in the universe on which He has set His image: the human person, every person, powerful and powerless alike.

Abraham, father of monotheism, knew the paradoxical truth that to live the life of faith is to see the trace of God in the face of the stranger. It is easy to receive the Divine Presence when God appears as God. What is difficult is to sense the Divine Presence when it comes disguised as three anonymous passers-by. That was Abraham’s greatness. He knew that serving God and offering hospitality to strangers were not two things but one.

By choosing the most radical of the three possible interpretations of Genesis 18, the sages allowed us to hear one of the most fundamental principles of the life of faith: We honour God by honouring His image, humankind.

From the Thought of Rabbi Sacks

Tzedakah is the gift of money or its equivalent. But sometimes that is not what we most need. We can suffer emotional as well as physical poverty. We can be depressed, lonely, close to despair. We may need company or comfort, encouragement or support. These too are human needs, no less real for being untranslatable into the language of politics or economics. That is what chessed is about: emotional support, loving-kindness, love as compassion. It is what we mean when we speak of God in Psalm 147 as one who ‘heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds’. It includes hospitality to the lonely, visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, raising the spirits of the depressed, helping people through crises in their lives, and making those at the margins feel part of the community. It is tzedakah’s other side.

Tzedakah is done with material goods, chessed with psychological ones: time and care. Tzedakah is practical support, chessed is emotional support. Tzedakah is a gift of resources, chessed a gift of the person. Even those who lack the means to give tzedakah can still give chessed. Tzedakah rights wrongs; chessed humanises fate.

Abraham and Sarah were chosen because of their chessed to others. Ruth became the ancestress of Israel's kings because of her chessed to Naomi. At the heart of the Judaic vision is the dream of a society based on chessed: society with a human face, not one dominated by the competition for wealth or power. Chessed is the mark of a people joined by covenant. Covenant creates society as extended family; it means seeing strangers as if they were our long-lost brothers or sisters. A community based on chessed is a place of grace, where everyone feels honoured and everyone is at home.

Ten Paths to God, Unit 6 – Chessed: Love as Compassion

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

What is the difference between tzedakah and chessed?

Abraham was known as a man of chessed. How do you think this impacts on his descendants?

Around the Shabbat Table

If the third interpretation of this story is correct, do you think Abraham was justified in speaking to God in this way?

Do you think the main focus of Judaism is our relationship with God or with our fellow man?

According to Rabbi Sacks, there is a central philosophical message contained in this story, a polemic against the other religions of the time, and perhaps also of our time. What is it?

“We honour God by honouring His image, humankind.” How can we do this? How can you do this in your life?

“To live the life of faith is to see the trace of God in the face of the stranger”.

How different from you does the stranger need to be? Do you think there a difference between doing chessed for a fellow Jew or a non-Jew?

Question Time

Do you want to win a Koren Aviv Weekday Siddur? This siddur has been designed to help young people explore their relationship to their God, and the values, history and religion of their people. Email CCFamilyEdition@rabbisacks.org with your name, age, city and your best question or observation about the parsha from the Covenant & Conversation Family Edition. Entrants must be 18 or younger. Each month we will select two of the best entries, and the individuals will each be sent a siddur inscribed by Rabbi Sacks! Thank you to Koren Publishers for kindly donating these wonderful siddurim.

Educational Companion

THE CORE IDEA

This is an open question, with no correct or incorrect answer. All three approaches are legitimate, despite Rabbi Sacks presenting the third one as the position of Jewish tradition (as proven by the halachic status of the term Adonai). The educational message of the third approach is a very strong one, and the basis of this week's Covenant & Conversation. But as Rabbi Sacks admits, the first approach is perhaps the easiest one to read into the text, and this could equally be argued for Rambam's approach also.

While it is understandable to consider Abraham's behaviour towards God as disrespectful, and even sacrilegious, the profound message here is that showing chessed to humanity is more important even than our relationship with God. To some extent this represents two different approaches within Judaism – one focuses more on our relationship with God (known as Mitzvot ben Adam leMakom) and the other on our relationship with our fellow man (known as Mitzvot ben Adam Lechavero). A balance between both approaches is also possible.

The message of the third interpretation is further explored in the “Thinking More Deeply” section. It suggests that the primary focus of Judaism is concerned with humanity, even if it is at the expense of our relationship with God. Having said that, a close reading of Rabbi Sacks' message is that when one honours our fellow man by treating him/her with respect and dignity, we are in fact also honouring God. Perhaps this is the balance between the two approaches, whereby our focus is both humanity and God.

IT ONCE HAPPENED...

This is an open question with no correct or incorrect answers. There are many inspiring parts to the story, including Ari's passion for the Jewish people and Israel, and the way he placed these as ultimate values in his life. But the way in which he died is also deeply inspiring and heroic. Perhaps the most inspiring part is the stories that are only coming to light after Ari's death – the acts of kindness that he performed out of the spotlight without anyone knowing about them.

A powerful aspect to the chessed Ari showed to this Arab family is that not only are they not Jewish, but they are a Palestinian Arab family. Ari fought for the Jewish people's right to live in its historic homeland. He ultimately lost his life to a terrorist who believed the Jewish people do not have such a right. However, Ari saw the humanity in the stranger in his midst and showed chessed to this family. It is often harder to show kindness and chessed to those that are not like us, but this is when chessed is most important, and Ari understood that.

FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

Tzedakah is monetary or practical support, while chessed is about emotional support, loving-kindness, and compassion.

Abraham's central quality was chessed and he was chosen to be the progenitor of the Jewish people. He can be considered a primary role model for the Jewish people, and perhaps just as his defining quality was chessed so the core value of Judaism, and the defining quality of the Jewish people is and should be chessed.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

Abraham is a model for us in how we can approach our relationship with God. But he modelled conflicting messages and values. On the one hand, he argued with God about the moral justification for destroying the cities of Sodom, and on the other hand he accepted the task of sacrificing his son Isaac without questioning the command at all. The third interpretation has Abraham asking God to be patient while he attends to the needs of the three visitors. It seems that Jewish tradition feels that this was a legitimate way to behave towards God, because it bestows the halachic holiness of the name of God to the word Adonai in this story.

Judaism has a dual focus – our relationship with God and on Mitzvot ben Adam leMakom; and our relationship with our fellow man, and on Mitzvot ben Adam Lechavero. A balance between both approaches is also possible. While perhaps maintaining an equal focus on both is the ideal, the message of this story seems to be that we can compromise on our honouring and respecting God, in order to bring respect and honour to the stranger. Having said that, Rabbi Sacks' message is that when one honours our fellow man by treating him/her with respect and dignity, we are in fact also honouring God. This question is asking for the people around your Shabbat table to consider real and practical ways that they can show honour and respect to the people in their lives, including those that are strangers to them. Examples of this could be the way they treat the members of their family, their friends, teachers, the bus driver and shop keeper that they interact with on a daily basis, as well as the stranger they have never met before and will probably not meet again. Abraham models this last example, showing kindness and respect to people that were not like him, and he had no expectations of meeting again. This is the ultimate example of chessed.

It is always easy to show kindness and love to those that are like us. That is the most natural thing in the world. Hence, we have immediate and unconditional love for those in our family and find it most easy to love those from our community and people. The greater moral challenge is showing equal kindness and love to those that are not like us – those that look different from us, or believe in different things to us, and have a different lifestyle to us. That is what we should strive for if we are to replicate Avraham's character trait of chessed.

The more different a stranger is from you, the harder human nature makes it to see them as a friend or even fellow human (in the brotherhood of mankind). Strangers are people that physically look different to you, speak differently to you, live life culturally different to you, and believe different things about life to you. The challenge is to see God in all these people no matter how different they are from you, and that is what Rabbi Sacks says is the definition of living a life of faith: believing that no matter how different we all are from each other, we are all created in the image of the Divine. This is what he terms in many different places as “the Dignity of Difference.” Although we have the concept in Jewish law that tzedakah begins at home, this is a pragmatic approach to the justice that is at the core of the mitzvah of tzedakah. Chessed, however, must be universal. And perhaps it can be argued that chessed in a context vastly different from your own, is a deeper and more profound act of kindness. It is easy to be kind to those that are the same as us. This is human nature and the clannish nature of humankind. Judaism asks us to transcend that, to see God in all of mankind, and to act on this through chessed. The words of this author reflect his/her own opinions and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Orthodox Union

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
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subject: Rav Frand - The Middle of the Road
Parshas Vayera

The Middle of the Road

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1050 – Saying No to A Rosh Yeshiva / To Your Host? Good Shabbos!
The Derech Hashem Runs Down the Middle of the Road

The Rambam writes in Hilchos Dayos that there are different types of people in the world, each with their own characteristics and opinions. There is a person who is quick to lose his temper and gets exceedingly angry. There is another person who is very calm and loses his temper very infrequently, if ever. One person is very haughty, another is very humble. One person has an insatiable appetite for all kinds of physical pleasures, while another has minimal physical needs. One person is exceedingly generous, another is very stingy. With all these middos [personality traits], there are people all along the spectrum, from one extreme to the other.

The Rambam writes that in each instance, both extremes of a particular personality trait are not the proper way. To be an extremist in any middah [singular for middos] is not good. A person should not “fly off the handle” all the time, but sometimes a person must employ anger; a person should not give away all his money, but neither should he be exceedingly tight fisted, and so on. The proper way, the Rambam writes, is the “Golden Mean” – the middle road. Each personality trait has a point equidistant between the two extremes that is most fitting and appropriate for proper behavior.

The Rambam says that this approach of the “Golden Mean” is called “Derech Hashem” [the path of G-d] by the Torah. This is what Avraham taught his descendants.

Where do we see that Avraham Avinu taught his children that they should always take this “middle approach?” The Rambam cites the pasuk [verse] in our parsha, “For I have cherished him because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem [Derech Hashem], doing charity and justice, in order that Hashem might bring upon Avraham that which He had spoken of him.” [Bereshis 18:19]

Where did the Rambam see this principle in this pasuk? Normally, whenever the Rambam cites a proof from a text, it is precise. The implication is usually clearly spelled out in the scriptural pesukim he quotes. Here, we are puzzled: How does this pasuk indicate that a person should conduct himself according to the “Golden Mean?”

The answer is that when the Rambam says that we need to approach life going down the middle path, he does not mean that a person ALWAYS needs to take the middle approach. The Rambam means that a person's attitude is equidistant from the two extremes, and that when the time comes, the person can employ one extreme or the other, as appropriate for the circumstances. It does not mean that we always take the middle road.

We do not say, when an urgent request for charity arrives, “Well, normally I respond to Tzedakah requests by giving the requestor \$100, and even though this fellow has a desperate need, I give everybody \$100, so I will give him \$100 as well.” The same applies in the case of a fellow who gives less. We do not want him to say, “I give \$2 to everybody so I will likewise give this case of urgent and desperate need \$2.” Sometimes it is appropriate to write a check for \$100, sometimes it is appropriate to write a check for \$1,000 and sometimes it is appropriate to write a check for \$2. There are situations which call for me to be overly generous, and there are also situations which call upon me to recognize that the person asking for the donation does not really need it.

The Golden Mean does not mean (no pun intended) that “one size fits all.” It means that a person should position himself in the middle of the road so that he can employ – when the situation calls for it – extremes in either direction. It is not correct that a person should absolutely never get angry. Sometimes you need to get angry – at least “facial anger” if not “anger in the heart” (i.e. – demonstrate by facial expression your extreme displeasure, if not actually losing your temper over the matter).

There are times when we must “pursue peace”; other times we must take a firm stand and be uncompromising. Our “default position” should be the middle of the road – that way we will be flexible enough to act at either end of the spectrum when the situation calls for it.

We learn this from Avraham as a result of the pasuk saying that Hashem knew that Avraham commanded the members of his house to engage in Tzedaka and Mishpat [charity and justice]. These two terminologies are fundamentally mutually exclusive. Tzedaka implies that it is not strict justice (Mishpat). On the other hand, Mishpat is not charity. The resolution of this ambiguous statement is that there is a time for Tzedaka and a time for Mishpat. Avraham commanded his family to position themselves in the middle-of-the-road default position so that they would be able to engage in Tzedaka when appropriate and – on the other hand – in Mishpat when that was appropriate.

When Hashem told Avraham to chase away Hagar, “execution of the law pierces the mountain” (i.e. – it was not a time to be merciful, it was a time to carry out Hashem's command). At other times, charity and compassion are more appropriate. This is where the Rambam derives the idea of the Derech Hashem being the approach of Avraham Avinu and being the path in life known as the “Golden Mean.”

The Prayers Helped... Eventually

The whole story of Avraham Avinu with Sodom is troublesome. Hashem says, “Will I hide from Avraham that which I am going to do?” [Bereshis 18:17] In other words, “Am I not going to tell him that I am about to destroy Sodom? I need to tell him!” Hashem knows what Avraham is going to do. It is that which in fact Avraham does – he is going to pray and bargain with Hashem NOT to destroy Sodom.

So Hashem knows what the end of the story is going to be. He also knows that there are not 50 righteous people in Sodom, nor are there 40 nor 30 nor 20 and not even 10 tzadikim in the city. So why give Avraham Avinu the opportunity to daven when Hashem knows that his prayers will be futile? What is the point?

The answer is a lesson that we all need to learn because it is so prevalent. The lesson is that no Tefillah [prayer] ever goes to waste. The prayers that Avraham Avinu offered for Sodom may not have helped for that situation but somewhere, sometime, some place those tefilos helped.

In fact, Rav Yonason Eybeschutz [1690-1764] in the Tiferes Yonasan says that this is similar to ma'aseh Avos siman l'Banim [the actions of the

patriarchs foreshadow the actions of the descendants]. Just like the deeds of the fathers blaze the trail for similar deeds by their children in a more literal sense, so too there is a concept that when a city is in trouble or a community is in trouble, they go to a Tzadik and request that he prays for them. Where does this come from? Rav Yonoson Eybeschütz says the original source for this custom is the action of Avraham in praying for Sodom. The patriarch Avraham instituted the concept that a Tzadik can daven for a city in trouble to save them from their plight.

This answers a question. In Tefilas Neilah, at the very end of Yom Kippur, when we pull out all stops, we invoke the following words: “Heaven forbid from You to do this thing, to kill the righteous along with the wicked. The Judge of the entire world will not do such a thing.” Now consider something: Is this a wise prayer to invoke at Neilah? These words are immediately recognizable as being lifted from the prayer of Avraham Avinu for Sodom [Bereshis 18:25]. However, it did not work then, so why are we using the same (failed) formula: Heaven forbid from you... (Chalilah Lecha..)?

The answer is that it DID work the first time. It may not have worked for the people of Sodom because they did not deserve it — but eventually it worked. It worked — according to the Tiferes Yonasan — in that now all Tzadikim can pray for communities in trouble. And it worked because sometime, someplace — it did have an impact. In fact, we can say that this is the underlying message of the sequence of pesukim: “Am I going to hide from Avraham that which I am going to do? [Bereshis 18:17] For Avraham is going to become a great and mighty nation. [ibid. 18:18] What does pasuk 18 have to do with pasuk 17? It does not seem to belong in this monologue. What does the fact that Avraham will in the future become a great and mighty nation have to do with the price of tea in this discussion?

The answer is that Hashem is saying the following: I am not going to hide from Avraham what I am about to do, and I know that Avraham is going to daven, and I know that his prayers at this juncture are not going to help Sodom. However, a great and mighty nation will descend from Avraham. I know that this nation is going to need those prayers at various times in the future. Let him verbalize those prayers now for the welfare of his future descendants.

I once told over an amazing story which I heard from Lev L’Achim workers in Eretz Yisrael, who were personally involved in this very incident.

There is a small shul on a street in Tel Aviv. It was Mincha time and they needed a tenth man. In the time honored tradition of Jews throughout the world, one of the nine assembled worshippers inside the shul went out to the street and looked for a “tenth man.” They could not find a tenth man. Suddenly, a young fellow walks by — a typical secular Israeli, — long hair, the whole works. They said, “Could you come in and help us make a minyan?” He responded, “I am not interested.” They pleaded, “We need a minyan. Someone has a Yahrzeit. He needs to say Kaddish. Please come in for a short time.” He was still not interested. Finally, they pestered the fellow so much that he agreed to come in.

He was totally unfamiliar with what was taking place inside. He just stood there. He stood there through Ashrei, Kaddish, etc. However, apparently, being in a shul for the first time in his life made an impression on him. One thing led to another. He contacted Lev L’Achim workers. The end of the story is that today this young man is an observant Jew.

However, this is not the whole story. This boy’s parents are totally secular Jews. Their son went “off the path” and became Chareidi [“ultra-Orthodox”]. His former friends came to his parents and asked them “What happened? You raised you son well. How could this have happened?” The father said, “Well, I know exactly what happened. This boy’s grandfather — my own father — was a religious Jew. He came to Eretz Yisrael but his son (myself) wanted to have nothing to do with Judaism. The son grew up totally secular and went his own way and he was going to make sure that his children would follow in the same path. It has to do with his grandfather, I guess.”

Here is the end of the story: The grandfather davened in this very shul in Tel Aviv that pulled his grandson in for the minyan. That was his shul. Think

about it. When this old Jew saw his son go “off the derech” and saw his grandson being raised as a secular Israeli — how many Tefillos did this man offer that Hashem bring them back to Yiddishkeit? He davened and davened and davened. “It didn’t help”... or so he thought! The grandfather never lived to see what happened. It did not happen then. It did not happen to his son. But apparently the Tefillos helped for his grandson.

That is what this pasuk is about. Hashem knew that Avraham was going to daven after He told him what He was planning to do to Sodom. Hashem knew that these prayers would be futile for Sodom, but Avraham was going to become a “great nation.” And one day, one place, one time, somewhere, somehow, those prayers would help his descendants.

There are many more stories of this kind, where Tefillos of grandparents or even parents which seemingly went to waste, helped — two or even three generations later — as all Tefillos do.

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. ...Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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Parshat Vayera: Putting a Bad Conscience to Use

Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm’s Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages — Genesis, co-published by OU Press and Maggid Books

Putting a Bad Conscience to Use

The story of the Akeida is, together with the revelation at Sinai, the central event in Jewish history and religion. One of the most remarkable aspects of this episode is the one word by which Abraham accepts upon himself this historic trial and its mental agonies and spiritual sufferings. God called to him, “Abraham!” and, in magnificent simplicity, the response is forthcoming: “Hineini,” “Behold, here I am,” or, “I am ready” (Genesis 22:1).

One of the commentators, Rabbi Abraham ben haRambam — the only son of Maimonides — emphasizes the quality of this response by contrasting it to that of Adam. He writes, “How great the difference between Abraham who answered the divine call with the word ‘hineini,’ and Adam who, when God called out to him, ‘Where are you?’ answered, ‘I saw that I was naked and so I hid.’”

Now this comparison is somewhat disturbing. The answer of Adam is, after all, the response of a human being pursued by God who demands an explanation for a terrible failure, whereas Abraham’s response is to a divine call not necessarily connected with any human offense. Is this not an invidious comparison? Is not Abraham great enough in his own right without seeking to enhance his reputation at the expense of his grandfather Adam? I believe the answer I wish to offer not only justifies the comment of Rabbi Abraham ben haRambam, but has the widest ramifications both for a proper

understanding of the Bible and for our own lives. This answer is that both men – Adam and Abraham – were, in a sense, being reprimanded! The story of the Akeida begins with the words, “And it came to pass after these things.” What things? asked the rabbis (Genesis Rabba 55:4). In their answer they indicate that the words of the Bible imply some severe introspection. The Akeida took place, they say, after hirhurei devarim, deep meditation and self-analysis by Abraham. Abraham, according to the rabbis, was troubled. He had a bad conscience which caused these hirhurei devarim, these introspective sessions. The Akeida was a kind of punishment, and it was brought on by Abraham’s errors.

What is it that troubled Abraham? There are several interpretations (see Genesis Rabba 55). One of them (a midrash cited in Kav haYashar) refers to the special celebration arranged by Abraham in honor of the weaning of his son Isaac. The Bible refers to that party as “mishteh gadol,” a great feast. Our tradition maintains that the greatness of this banquet was due to the guests who attended: “Gedolim hayu sham” – a party which was attended by all the giants of the time. Shem attended, Eber was there, Og was one of the guests – all the crowned heads of the ancient Near East were at the great party that Abraham prepared. But this is precisely where the trouble lay: only the gedolim, the great ones, were there; but there was no mention of ketanim, small people, ordinary human beings, the poor, and the marginal and the unwanted. Certainly Abraham, who was renowned for his hospitality over all else, should have known enough that at his personal simcha he ought to have as major participants also the poor and the rejected. Abraham’s conscience troubled him; had he not contributed to a subtle transformation and dangerous degradation from hospitality to mere entertainment? For this should be an occasion for the uplifting of downtrodden spirits, not the namedropping of high and exalted personages.

But whatever occasioned Abraham’s troubled conscience, it was responsible for the Akeida episode. So that the divine call to Abraham was a conscience-call. What Rabbi Abraham ben haRambam meant, then, was that both Adam and Abraham responded to the call of a bad conscience – Adam for the eating of the forbidden fruit, and Abraham for his omissions at the feast – but that is where the comparison ends. When it comes to the responses of these two individuals: “How great the difference!”

When Adam sinned and heard God calling him, he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden”; in the underbrush of his mind there takes place the rustling of a primitive conscience. “I saw that I was naked”; there is a sudden awareness of his nakedness, of shame and disgrace. And so what does he do? “And so I hid”; he withdraws, hides himself, denies that he did anything wrong. He runs away and, when confronted by God, blames his wife or the serpent... How different is Abraham! God calls him and his response is: “Hineini,” “Here I am!” I am willing to harness my bad conscience to a good use. I am ready to go through an akeida, to overcome the past by creative achievement in the future, teaching the world the real meaning of faith and the lengths to which one must go in order to uphold it. Rashi tells us that the word hineini implies both anava, and zimun – it is the language of both meekness and preparedness. Indeed, it is the language of meekness because it reveals a bad conscience, and it is the language of preparedness because Abraham is ready to do something about it. He is ready to take the bad conscience and make good use of it.

So the difference between Adam and Abraham is in what to do with a bad conscience: whether to hide or to use it. And what a difference there is between them! A bad conscience irritates the mind and the heart, until that bad conscience is either repressed or converted into something creative and constructive. It is much like the grain of sand that is either expelled by the oyster from under its shell, or transformed into a shiny and precious pearl. This example of Abraham has been repeated at chosen moments throughout history. The Nobel prizes which were awarded recently offer such an example. Alfred Nobel is a man who gave a fortune for awards to those who contribute to the advancement of peace in the world. Why did he do this? It was an effort to overcome his bad conscience for having created dynamite

and made war more destructive. Many of the greatest Torah scholars in our history were people who brought to their spiritual and intellectual endeavors a special passion that arose from the knowledge of having strayed in their youth.

The same holds true for philanthropy. I knew a man who was very generous in his endowments of various communal institutions. As so often happens, others begrudged him this mitzva. They pointed to certain incidents in his past which were not luminous examples of all the great virtues. What should be the Jewish reaction? It should be: marvelous! God bless that man! The greatest communal institutions were built by people who knew how to use a bad conscience and convert it to good use. Hospitals, schools, synagogues, welfare institutions of all kinds, are the products of people who have learned from Abraham to take their hirhurei devarim and use it to say “hineini” to the call of God. And who, after all, is there who is so saintly that he never has an occasion for a bad or troubled conscience? On the contrary, any man or woman who honestly feels that he or she has no bad conscience at all should have a bad conscience for being so insensitive as not to have a bad conscience! Would we rather a man have no conscience at all, that he be a oral idiot? Would we rather he be like Adam who responds only with “and so I hid” – that he deny his past, that he evade his responsibility? Certainly the transformation of guilt into philanthropy has a respectable precedent in the hineini of Abraham.

From: Netvort@aol.com

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Subject: Netvort : parshas Vayeira, 5765

Getting There

By Rabbi Joshua (moderately known as The Hoffer) **Hoffman**

Before destroying Sodom and the other cities in the area, God decides to inform Avrohom of His plan. He says, "Shall I conceal from Avrohom what I will do, and Avrohom will surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him? For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of God, doing charity and justice, in order that God might bring upon Avrohom that which He had spoken of him" (Bereishis 18:17-19). Apparently, God is saying that Avrohom's path in life, that he was passing on to his family, was in complete contrast to the pattern of living exhibited in the four towns, especially in Sodom, and God therefore wanted Avrohom to understand why these cities, which He had promised to give to him, were about to be destroyed. What exactly was the nature of this contrast, and how was it brought out in the discussion that Avrohom had with God concerning the destruction of these cities?

Rav Aryeh Leib Bakst, zt"l, in his Kol Aryeh, writes that the philosophy of the people of Sodom was that every person has to stand on his own two feet, and not receive support from others. Thus, they followed the path of strict justice, and did not temper it with charity. This accounts for the seemingly bizarre midrashim which describe the practices in Sodom, to persecute anyone who would dare to help a poor person. Avrohom, on the other hand, taught that one must combine charity with justice, and thereby sought to unify all people. By practicing charity and teaching it to his children, he saw to it that anyone who was in need would be provided for, in recognition of the fact that all people are connected. The Rambam, in his Laws of Mourning (14:2), cites the verse that describes Avrohom's teachings as an indication that Avrohom passed on the trait of chesed - performing acts of kindness - to his descendants. Although Rav Bakst does not mention it, the Talmud (Shabbos 151b), based on a verse in Devorim (15:2), refers to poverty as a wheel that revolves in the world, and that it can catch anyone up in its spokes. Moreover, in connection with the mitzvah of charity, the Rambam writes in his Laws of Gifts to the Poor (10: 2), that all Jews are

connected and must take care of each other, providing the poor with their needs.

Rav Bakst also explains that when Avrohom pleaded with God to save the people of the five cities, his basic argument was to save them through the existence of ten righteous people, either ten in each of the cities, or ten each in some of the cities, or at least in one of them. The unit of ten represents a certain kind of internal unity, as reflected in the concept of a minyan for prayer. Although not mentioned by Rav Bakst, the aspect of unity that is behind the institution of the minyan is elaborated upon by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero in his work, Tomer Devorah. He writes that once there are ten people present, they represent the entire Jewish nation, and even another thousand people will not add, in any fundamental way, to that basic element.

Avrohom felt that if he could demonstrate the existence of this core concept of unity in any of the cities, there was a chance for their rehabilitation.

However, he failed to find the ten people in any of the cities, and, therefore, they were destroyed.

Although Rav Bakst's approach explains many of the midrashim that discuss the low moral level of the people of Sodom and its neighbors, it does not explain one particularly strange midrash, which Rav Bakst himself cites. The midrash says that visitors to Sodom were placed on a bed, and if they were too short for it, their bodies were stretched out, and if they were too long, their legs were cut down to size. Readers may recall that a similar kind of bed is described in Greek mythology as the special torture chamber of a character named Proustes, and that his practice was memorialized in the coining of the term for a literary device known as the Proustean bed. The basic concept behind this kind of practice is that there is a need for conformity, that one size fits all. The people of Sodom, then, did want unity, but a unity of a particular kind. Rather than the spiritual unity of all people that Avrohom taught, as explained by Rav Bakst, they wanted an external unity, and would not accept the existence of anyone who deviated from their approach to life. What remains for us to understand is how Avrohom's teaching of charity and justice, as expressed by God before He spoke to Avrohom of the coming destruction, served as a contrast to Sodom, and how it informed Avrohom's discussion of that destruction. I believe we can answer these questions by referring to another passage in the Rambam, not cited by Rav Bakst.

The Rambam, in his Laws of Ethical Ideas (Hilchos Deos 1:1), writes that different people have, by their nature, different kinds of character traits. Some people are temperamental and always angry, others are very even tempered and never angry, one is arrogant, another humble, lustful, or pure, etc. The proper path to take, he says, is the middle one. This path, he says, was taught by Avrohom, as the Torah tells us, "... he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of God, doing charity and justice." Thus, the path taken by Avrohom was one which took into consideration the different kind of nature each person has, and sought to guide each person in the ways of moderation. Unlike the people of Sodom, Avrohom allowed each person to develop his character in accordance with the natural tendencies he displayed, leading ultimately to a middle path. Rav Yosef Dov Solovetichik, zt"l, explained that the middle path which the Rambam advocates does not require one to act in every circumstance in a way that is exactly in the middle of the spectrum of choices. Rather, it teaches that in each situation confronting a person, he should weigh his options and act according to the needs of the moment as well as his own current standing in connection with a particular character trait. If he acts appropriately, he will, in the end, be on the middle path, since, in most cases, that is the appropriate way to go. However, in some cases, it is necessary to go to one or the other extreme along the spectrum, or to deviate somewhat from the middle. Thus, a person may need to become a nazir temporarily and totally abstain from wine, in order to correct a certain tendency he has developed. The main result desired, however, is that, in an overall sense, each person follows a path of moderation. Perhaps, then, this is why Avrohom was invited by God to enter into the divine laboratory, as it were,

and discuss the way in which the judgment of Sodom would be carried out. Through working out, together with God, the manner of the awaiting punishment, Avrohom considered the spectrum of possibilities and argued the case with God, presenting a range of arguments through which they may be saved. At the end of the day, he failed to save them, but he did teach future generations something about God's way of judging people and nations, and, also the path which we need to follow in our own lives, in fulfillment of the mitzvoh of walking in God's ways.

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Praying For Others Vayeira (Genesis 18-22) Nov 6, 2011 | by **Rabbi Ozer Alport**

Praying For Others

Rashi writes that the section recounting Sarah's conception of Yitzhak (Genesis 21:1) is juxtaposed to Avraham's prayers that Avimelech's wife and maids be able to conceive (20:17-18) to teach that if a person prays on behalf of somebody else when he himself needs that same thing, he will be answered first.

A man once approached Rabbi Yitzhak Zilberstein of Bnei Brak with a fascinating question about this concept:

It is traditionally understood that this procedure works as a reward for the selflessness demonstrated by somebody who desperately needs something himself, yet is able to magnanimously overlook his own personal needs to pray for another person in need of that very same thing. The man questioned whether this technique is effective even when a person prays for somebody else only out of a hope that doing so will cause him to be answered, or must the prayers for the other be genuine in order for this method to work? Rabbi Zilberstein answered based on the Maharal's explanation of this idea. The Maharal writes that God is the source of all blessings which come to the world. However, in order for His blessings to descend upon a person, there must be a conduit which connects that person to the Heavenly source of goodness and facilitates the transfer. One such channel is prayer. When we pray to God, we connect ourselves to Him and allow Him to bestow His bounty upon us. When one prays on behalf of another and his prayers are answered, he becomes the channel which links his friend to the Divine source of blessing.

When a person uses a hose to water his lawn, the hose - which serves as the conduit for the transfer of water - becomes wet even before the grass does. Similarly, a person who merits serving as the medium by which God bestows His kindness upon another becomes "wet" with the goodness even before it reaches its ultimate target. Therefore, although it may be contrary to conventional wisdom, the power of prayer is so great that one who prays for his friend - even for ulterior motives - will still merit to be answered first.

NO BREAD FOR THE GUESTS

Rashi writes (18:8) that although Avraham had requested Sarah to make bread, it wasn't served because it became impure when Sarah touched it, and the Talmud (Bava Metzia 87a) teaches that Avraham was careful to eat all of his food in a state of ritual purity. Although Avraham observed this stringency, why did he impose it on the guests and deny them the opportunity to enjoy the bread?

Rabbeinu Bechaye notes that this episode occurred on Pesach (see Rashi 19:3). Because Avraham wouldn't eat bread that became impure, Sarah stopped making it, and it became chametz. Because it is forbidden to derive

any benefit from chametz on Pesach, Avraham was unable to serve it to his guests.

Alternatively, the Chavatzeles HaSharon explains that it is forbidden to cook on Yom Tov for non-Jewish guests. Because Avraham was no longer able to eat the matzah which had become impure, Sarah was no longer permitted to prepare it for the guests, who appeared in the guise of Arabs (Rashi 18:4). Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik suggests that part of the mitzvah of hosting guests is to make them so comfortable that they feel as if they are part of the host family. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to serve them something that the host himself would not eat. (Pardes Yosef, Peninim Vol. 6)

* * *

AVRAHAM'S UNIQUE CHALLENGE

Avraham was the paragon of piety and righteousness. Without precedent, he had single-handedly discovered God, intuited the laws of the Torah and obeyed them even before they were given, and spread the knowledge of God in the world. He had already passed with flying colors the vast majority of the 10 tests to which God subjected him (Avot 5:3).

After passing the test of the Akeidah, the angel told him, "Now I know that you are a God-fearing person" (22:12). Why was Avraham's fear of God established only at this time? Hadn't he repeatedly proven it by all that he accomplished in life?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the value of a mitzvah is measured by the degree to which its performance runs counter to a person's natural inclinations and represents a more difficult test of his devotion to God. Avraham had clearly proven his devotion to God and had passed numerous trials, but a number of them played into the central attribute of his Divine service, which was chesed. On the other hand, although the willingness to personally sacrifice one's own son to God is difficult for any father, its challenge was significantly magnified for one whose entire life was devoted to the trait of kindness. As this trial required Avraham to act counter to his nature and all that he stood for, it was considered the trial which uniquely demonstrated Avraham's devotion to God.

While every person has different mitzvot which specifically challenge him, the Talmud (Avot 4:1) teaches that the strong person is one who conquers his evil inclination, and that the harder a mitzvah is for a person, the greater will be the reward (Avot 5:26). We can learn this lesson from the tremendous praise given to Avraham for acting counter to his nature at the Akeidah.

About the Author Rabbi Ozer Alport More by this Author Ozer Alport was born and raised in Kansas City, a rare third-generation Midwestern Jew. After graduating from Harvard with a degree in economics, he went on to study in the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem for five years. He now lives in Brooklyn, where he teaches weekly Torah classes and authors Aish.com's Parsha Potpourri column, which were released in book form in 2012. To receive his weekly Torah emails, write to oalport@post.harvard.edu .

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subject: Rabbi Reisman's Chumash Shiur -

Rabbi Reisman - Parshas Vayeira 5777

1. At the beginning of the Parsha we have the three Arab guests who come to Avraham Avinu. The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos 127a (8 lines from the bottom) which is well-known says (אמר רב יהודה אמר רב גדולה הכנסת אורחין) (מהקבלת פני שכניה). We learn from here that Avraham Avinu who was busy being Mekabeil Pnei Hashechina and diverted himself to accepting these guests and from here we learn that greater is Hachnosas Orchim than Kabbalas Pnei Hashechina.

Rav Shlomo Heiman in his Chiddushei Rav Shlomo, Nichtavim Siman 34 asks, Osek Mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah. Avraham Avinu is not obligated in Hachnosas Orchim. The Halacha is that if you are Osek in one Mitzvah you are Patur from a different Mitzvah. Therefore, the entire idea seems to be

off. We don't measure Osek Mitzvah in how great a Mitzvah is. If you are busy with one Mitzvah you don't go and do another Mitzvah instead.

Rav Shlomo answers that the rule of Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah does not apply to a Mitzvah Kiyumis. Meaning to say, that an obligation like that of shaking a Lulav or blowing a Shofar is a Mitzvah which you are obligated to do or the Gemara has an example of someone who finds an Aveida and you are taking care of it then Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah. That is something that he must do. But there are Mitzvos Kiyumis, Mitzvos that you don't have to do but you choose to do, you elect to do and we don't say Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah. This is Rav Shlomo's Yesod.

There is a source for this in the Nesivos Hamishpat Siman 72:19 who writes that someone who is Osek in Gabaos for a Tzedaka, he is in the Yeshiva working in the office busy collecting money for the Yeshiva. Or he is involved in board meetings for a Shul. He is Osek in Gabaos which is something that is involved in Tzorchei Mitzvah and at that time an Ani comes to him, so Lechora we should say Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah, if he busy with Tzorchei Tzibbur he should be Patur from giving Tzedakah.

The Nesivos says no, that is a Mitzvah Kiyumis, he is not obligated to be involved in the Shul, he is not obligated to be involved, it is a Mitzvah but it is not an obligation Mitzvah, it is a Mitzvah Kiyumis and we do not say Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah. Here we have a beautiful Yesod that Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah does not apply by a Mitzvah that you are not obligated to do.

The Imrei Binah in Orach Chaim Siman 13 asks a Kasha on the Nesivos. This rule seems to be contradicted in Maseches Sukkah 26a that says that someone who is busy selling Tefillin is Patur from Mitzvos because Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah. We learn that Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah from the Posuk of Uv'lecticha Baderech. B'leches B'derech Didach. You should be involved in other Mitzvos V'lo B'leches Shamayim. Not when you are busy doing Shamayim Mitzvos. Therefore, the Gemara says that someone who is a Mocher Tefillin is Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah. That seems to contradict the Nesivos and Rav Shlomo. A Kasha. According to that the Kasha comes back on our Parsha.

The Chavatzeles Hasharon brings a beautiful Teretz. A Teretz that is very Mistaver. He says the rule that we know from Gemara Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah, if you are involved in one Mitzvah you don't have to do another Mitzvah, there are really two parts to it. One is that you are really Patur, you are not obligated to drop one Mitzvah to do another. What about if you want to, you want to drop one to do another. Well Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah is also an Issur. You are doing a Mitzvah, you don't drop it to go do another Mitzvah. The Nesivos and Rav Shlomo are referring to the second part. The fact that when you are Osek B'mitzvah you don't have to do another Mitzvah that is true in all cases and therefore, someone selling Tefillin is not obligated to go sit in a Sukkah and do other Mitzvos. The Issur of doing another Mitzvah, that doesn't apply to a Mitzvah Kiyumis. If you are sitting in a board meeting or if you are involved in collecting money for a poor family, it is not Assur to go do another Mitzvah. After all, you are not obligated to do the first Mitzvah at all. You can stop it and just go to sleep, certainly you can stop it to do something else. Therefore, Osek B'mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah that you are not allowed to do another Mitzvah, that is true when it is a Mitzvah Chiyuvis an obligatory Mitzvah, however, by a Mitzvah Kiyumis you can divert to go do another Mitzvah.

With this we understand much better Avraham Avinu. Avraham Avinu was Mekabeil Pnei Hashechina, he could have said that I am Osek in a Mitzvah and I don't have to go and greet the Hachnosas Orchim but since Gedola Hachnasas Orchim, he chose, he elected to divert from a Mitzvah Kiyumis to do another Mitzvah. Ad Kan this is what it says there. Very Geshmak.

A person should learn from this Gemara that someone who is selling Tefillin and is Osek B'mitzvah and the Gemara says if you find something and you

are busy putting it away you are Osek B'mitzvah. There are many things that we do that we do not fully appreciate and they fall under the category of Osek B'mitzvah. It would be natural for someone now to ask the following Shaila. What happens if I am Davening and a collector comes around, do I say in that case that Osek B'Mitzvah Patur Min Hamitzvah or not? Maybe it should be the same rule?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky in his Derech Emunah, Hilchos Matnas Aniyim, Perek Yud. In the Shaar Hatzion on the bottom Os 96 is Mesupaik, he expresses a Safeik if you are in the middle of Davening whether you break to give Tzedakah. After all, Davening is a Mitzvah Chiyuvus and it should be Assur.

Many years ago, in the Am Hatorah journal which is published by the Agudas Yisrael, there was a letter from Rav Dovid Feinstein in which he responded to this Shaila and he said something very Geshmak. The Shaila was in the middle of Davening are you Osek B'mitzvah and Patur from giving Tzedakah. Rav Dovid answered very wisely. He said it is a Sugya in the Gemara and the Shulchan Aruch that in middle of Birchas Kriyas Shema if a person comes and says good morning are you allowed to respond to him and there the Halacha is that if it is Mipnei Kevodo, if you have to have respect for him you do answer him. In middle of Pesukai D'zimra certainly.

Zagt Hagaon Rav Dovid if so, if there is someone collecting, since there is a specific exception that during Birchas Kriyas Shema and certainly Pesukai D'zimra you are allowed to be Mafsik to say Aleichem Shalom, so if it is someone that you have Kavod for, you have respect for, you give him Tzedakah. On the other hand, if there is someone who is obviously not religious, as for example there is a fellow who comes around collecting in Flatbush and when they say Kedusha he has no idea why the people are standing straight and he has no idea what Kedusha is. He may be a Tinok Shenishba but there is no obligation of respect for him, no Kavod for him. In this case it would seem that one is Dafka not Mafsik in order to give him Tzedakah. Ad Kan, we got into a Lomdeshe Sugya.

2. Let's talk about an Inyan of Machshava. At the end of the Parsha is the Akeidah. The Gemara in Maseches Rosh Hashana 16a (3 lines from the bottom) says that we blow Shofar on Rosh Hashana with a Shofar of an Ayil (ram). Why? Because HKB"H said (אמר רבי אבהו למה תוקעין בשופר של איל אמר רבי אבהו ברוך הוא תקעו לפני בשופר של איל כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק). The Akeida is not the ram, the ram is something that Avraham did afterwards as sort of a consolation prize. He had the big Mitzvah to be Makriv his son and then the Ribbono Shel Olam sent a Malach to say don't do it and then he brought an Ayil in his place. Bringing the ram is not a big Mitzvah, the Mitzvah is the Akeida. Why is blowing the Shofar Shel Ayil something that reminds Hashem Kavayochel of the Akeida.

A more pointed question, if you look in the Parsha you will see that Avraham Avinu is ready to sacrifice his son and the Malach says in 22:12 (אל-תשלה ידך אל-הנער, ואל-תעש לו, קאומה). Don't do anything to him. Then the Malach says to him that (כי-ירא אלרים אתה) (כי עתה ידעת, כי-ירא אלרים אתה). Now I know that you are a Yir'ai Elokim and it doesn't give him any promise of reward. After that, Avraham brings a ram, as a sacrifice and after the ram is offered the Malach speaks to him again and then he says 22:16 (וען אשר עשית את-הדבר הזה, ולא יען אשר עשית את-הדבר הזה, ולא יען אשר עשית את-הדבר הזה). Then he says 22:17 (כי-ברך אברהם את-עניו, וירא והנה-איל, אחר, נאחו בסבך בקרניו). Then he promises him a reward. Again, there seems to be something important about this ram because before the ram was offered there is no promise of reward only afterwards. Halo Davar Hu! Why is it that way?

A third question. After Avraham refrains from Shechting Yitzchok the Posuk says 22:13 (וישא אברהם את-עניו, וירא והנה-איל, אחר, נאחו בסבך בקרניו). There was another ram in the brush stuck with his horns. The word Acher seems to be wrong. Why is it mentioning another ram? What other ram, there is only one ram?

The Har Tzvi Al Hatorah says a Pshat and I have seen this elsewhere. He says beautifully. He says the Etzem Akeidas Yitzchok was a Nisayon, but after all, Avraham heard the command straight from the Ribbono Shel Olam,

so is it such a tremendous Chiddush that he did what Hashem wanted? Ok, it is a Nisayon. What made Avraham's behavior exemplary was this. Afterwards, when the Malach said to Avraham do not kill your son, do not offer your son as a sacrifice, Avraham should have danced for joy.

Avraham was disappointed. He wanted to be able to express his Ahavah to the Ribbono Shel Olam. He wanted somehow to be able to do something, an extraordinary act. He saw (איל, אחר, נאחו בסבך בקרניו), he saw a second sacrifice. The Ayil wasn't just a separate incident, a consolation prize. Avraham's tremendous drive to do the Ratzon Hashem and to bring him a Korban which he thought he would do with his own son was instead done with this ram. The ram is an exhibition, it shows the tremendous Ahavah, the tremendous Mesirah of Avraham Avinu. Therefore, after that then the Malach promised him reward. (כי-ברך אברהם את-עניו, וירא והנה-איל, אחר, נאחו בסבך בקרניו). Because it is one thing to offer your son as a sacrifice when you heard it directly from G-d and it is another thing to feel let down when the Ribbono Shel Olam asks you not to do it.

And so, a tremendous lesson. A tremendous lesson in devotion to HKB"H. There are times that we do things that are not easy for us to serve Hashem. There are times that we sacrifice. We have to learn to do with a Ratzon, there should be a desire to sacrifice. Giving something up for HKB"H is a tremendous opportunity. If you are sitting and learning and you are exhausted, you are tired and you have a good excuse, you can space out, you can put your head down, you can go home and instead you push yourself. You have a Daf Yomi Shiur and you stand up instead of feeling drowsy when you are sitting with everyone. You pull over a Shtender, you rededicate yourself after you have an excuse to bow out, that makes everything that much more Chashuv. So push yourself and be willing to do more to show that that which you are doing is with a tremendous Ahavas Hashem.

And so, an amazing Parsha, Parshas Vayeira, one for which there is so much to learn from. A Gut Gebenched Shabbos to one and all!

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Davening for Rain in the Southern Hemisphere

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

It might be beneficial to read through the article I sent out last week before reading this article.

Question #1: Mixed Messages

"How can you have two shullen in the same city, one saying vesein tal umatar, and the other not, on the same day?"

Question #2: Western Travelers

How early did western mankind begin traveling in the southern hemisphere?

Question #3: South of the Border

"What do Buenos Aires, Montivedeo, Recife, and Wellington and Auckland, New Zealand have in common, but not Johannesburg, Perth, and Santiago, Chile?"

Introduction

Although we are all aware that we cease reciting both mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar on the first day of Pesach, most people are surprised to discover that there is a halachic controversy whether this is the correct procedure in America. This has halachic ramifications both for people in the United States and certainly for those who live in South America, particularly those living in Argentina, Chile and Brazil, which are in the southern hemisphere. We will also discover that there is a major dispute among halachic authorities as to when people living in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and other parts of the southern hemisphere should recite mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar, in what part of shemoneh esrei they should recite vesein tal umatar, and when they recite tefilas tal and tefilas geshem.

But first we need to study the Talmudic sources on the topic. The early halachic sources discuss two special inserts to our davening, mashiv haruach umorid hagashem, “He who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall,” and vesein tal umatar, “grant dew and rain upon the face of the earth.” The first is praise of Hashem and, therefore, it is inserted into the second brocha of our davening, both on weekdays and Shabbos, since the first three brochos of the shemoneh esrei are devoted to praise. The second is a prayer beseeching Hashem to provide rain, and as such is recited in birchas hashanim, the appropriate brocha of the weekday shemoneh esrei. Should one forget to recite vesein tal umatar in its appropriate place in birchas hashanim, one may still recite it during the brocha of shomei’a tefillah. Missed them

Should one forget to recite either mashiv haruach umorid hagashem or vesein tal umatar when required, one is obligated to repeat the shemoneh esrei. However, there is a halachic difference between the two that is already noted by the Tur. Should one recite morid hatal, praising Hashem for providing dew, rather than mashiv haruach umorid hagashem, one is not required to repeat the shemoneh esrei. Nevertheless, when it is the time to recite vesein tal umatar, someone who prayed only for dew would be required to repeat the shemoneh esrei.

Mashiv haruach umorid hagashem

The Mishnah (Taanis 2a) cites a dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua concerning when one begins to recite mashiv haruach umorid hagashem, Rabbi Eliezer contending that we begin on the first day of Sukkos, whereas Rabbi Yehoshua maintains that we begin on Shemini Atzeres. The Gemara explains that Rabbi Eliezer’s basis is that there are two mitzvos observed on Sukkos that are associated with our need for rain, the ceremony of nisuch hamayim, which involves the pouring of water on the mizbeiach in the Beis Hamikdash, and the taking of the lulav, esrog, hadasim and aravos. In Rabbi Eliezer’s opinion, these mitzvos demonstrate that we should praise Hashem on Sukkos for His role as Rainmaker.

Both Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua agree that we do not want it to rain on Sukkos itself, because this makes it difficult or even impossible to observe the mitzvah of sukkah. As the Mishnah (Sukkah 28b) records, rain on Sukkos can be compared to a servant bringing his master a gift that the master pours into the servant’s face. We build a sukkah hoping to serve Hashem by observing His mitzvah, and then it rains on our party! For this reason, Rabbi Yehoshua says that we do not begin reciting mashiv haruach umorid hagashem until there is no longer a mitzvah of living in the sukkah. Rabbi Eliezer agrees that we do not request rain during Sukkos, but he contends that reciting mashiv haruach umorid hagashem is appropriate, since it is praise of Hashem and not a request for rain. Rabbi Yehoshua responds that, even so, it is inappropriate for us to praise Hashem as Rainmaker at a time when rain is considered a siman kelalah, a sign of a curse, because it demonstrates that Hashem has rejected our observance of His mitzvos. The Gemara rules according to Rabbi Yehoshua.

Beginning Vesein tal umatar

Regarding when to begin reciting vesein tal umatar, the Mishnah (Taanis 10a) records a dispute between an anonymous tanna, who contends that we begin on the third day of Marcheshvan, and Rabban Gamliel, who says that we begin on the seventh day of Marcheshvan. This is fifteen days after Sukkos, which allows those who traveled for Yom Tov to Yerushalayim by foot to return home before it begins to rain. The Gemara rules that the halacha accords with Rabban Gamliel’s opinion.

Continuing this discussion, the Gemara quotes a beraisa stating that the Mishnah expresses the practice that is followed in Eretz Yisroel. However, in “the exile,” they begin praying for rain many weeks later, on the day the Gemara calls “sixty days after the equinox,” the details of which we will leave for a different time. Rashi explains that in Bavel, which is located in a river valley, there is less need for rain than in Eretz Yisroel. Too much rain in Bavel could cause dangerous flooding, and therefore they begin praying for rain later.

Thus far, we know that in Eretz Yisroel one begins recital of vesein tal umatar on the seventh of Marcheshvan, whereas in Bavel it is begun significantly later.

Southern hemisphere

All of this lengthy discussion and last week’s article are an introduction to our topic, since until now we have been discussing life in the northern hemisphere, the world north of the equator. In the era of the Mishnah, Gemara and rishonim, to the best of our knowledge, there were no Jews living south of the equator, which runs through the northern part of South America, mid-Africa, and through the Indian Ocean south of India. In today’s world, there are Jewish communities in the following countries south of the equator: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, New Zealand, South Africa and Uruguay, and, to a lesser extent, in Ecuador and Bolivia. All of these lands were unknown to the European and Middle Eastern world until the era of discovery began in the days of Columbus. Of these lands, the first discovered was probably South Africa, discovered by Vasco da Gama during his voyage that began in 1497, and then Brazil, discovered in 1500 by Pedro Cabral.

By the early seventeenth century there was already a Jewish community in Brazil that sent questions germane to when they should recite mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar. The earliest responsum was written by a prominent posek of Salonica, Rav Chayim Shabtai, who was the rav in Salonica until his passing in 1647, and whose responsa were published as Shu”t Toras Chayim. His undated responsum is addressed to someone inquiring about the practices of the Jewish community in Brazil, without identifying which city in that country. The teshuvah identifies them as being south of the equator, which is indeed where almost all of Brazil is located. The letter could not have been from the two largest Jewish communities in Brazil today, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, because neither of those cities existed yet in the 17th century, but it might have been from one of the earlier colonial cities of Belem or Recife (then called Pernambuco).

The questioner assumes that rain during their summer months, which are between Sukkos and Pesach, would be very harmful. Therefore, the Brazilian community wanted to recite mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar between Pesach and Sukkos and not recite them between Sukkos and Pesach.

In the article, “Should I daven for rain when we need it?” which I sent out last week, I mention the dispute in the Gemara whether these two prayers, mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar, are recited according to local conditions, such as those of a city whose weather pattern varies significantly from nearby locales. The Gemara’s example is the people of the city of Nineveh, where rain was necessary throughout the summer. Could they recite vesein tal umatar in Boreich aleinu, when it usually is recited, or should/must they recite it in Shema koleinu.

The halachic conclusion is that mashiv haruach umorid hagashem is never said according to local conditions, whereas vesein tal umatar is not said in the usual place in shemoneh esrei, but in the brocha of Shema koleinu.

I also discussed there the dispute among rishonim whether an entire country recites these brochos according to their local climate needs or not. The Rosh rules that they do, and thus he contended that Spain or Germany should follow local climate needs when reciting these two brochos. The Rosh further contended that the Rambam agreed with his interpretation of the halacha. We also noted that most authorities disagreed with the Rosh, and that some later authorities disagreed with the Rosh’s understanding of the Rambam’s opinion.

Contradiction in Rambam

At this point, we will examine how the Rosh explains the Rambam in a way that sustains his opinion. The Rosh noted that the Rambam’s statement in his commentary to the Mishnah in Taanis appears to conflict with what he wrote in Hilchos Tefillah, “Places that require rain in the summer, such as distant islands of the sea, ask for rain when they require it in shomei’a tefillah” (Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 2:15-17). Yet, the Rambam in the Mishnah

commentary states that they should treat their rainy season as Eretz Yisroel treats the 7th of Marcheshvan, which means that they should recite vesein tal umatar in birchas hashanim, not in shomei'a tefillah.

In the Rambam's commentary to the Mishnah Taanis, while explaining the laws that we have shared above, he adds: "All these laws apply in Eretz Yisroel and the lands that are similar to it... However, in other lands, one should recite vesein tal umatar at the time that rain is beneficial for that place, and, in that time, one should follow the practice of (Eretz Yisroel on) the 7th of Marcheshvan (meaning that they should pray for rain when it is beneficial for them). This is because there are lands in which it does not begin to rain until Nissan. In lands in which the summer is in Marcheshvan and rain then is not good for them, but it is deadly and destructive, how can the people of such a place ask for rain in Marcheshvan? – this is a lie!" (Since rain is now detrimental for them, why are they asking for it?)

Tangentially, there is an observation that results from the Rambam's words, which is of a historical nature rather than a halachic one. The Rambam was aware that there are places in the world in which the seasons are reversed from ours, such as in the southern hemisphere. Historically, this presents a tremendous curiosity, since I have been unable to ascertain that there was settlement of Jews in the southern hemisphere until four hundred years after the Rambam's demise! However, it appears that, in the Rambam's day, Arab traders had already visited the eastern coast of Africa south of the equator, or, alternatively, had sailed to islands in the Indian Ocean that were south of the equator. I have not seen any historians note this point.

In view of the Rambam's words, we can address the second of our opening questions: "How early did western mankind begin traveling in the southern hemisphere?"

From the Rambam's comments, it is evident that this was as early as the twelfth century. It may be that Vasco de Gama was the first European to sail around the southern tip of what is today South Africa, but he was certainly not the first old world explorer to sail to the southern hemisphere!

Returning to the comments of the Rosh:

The Rosh resolves the contradiction in the Rambam's position by explaining that there is a difference between a city and a region. A city with exceptional needs should recite vesein tal umatar only in shomei'a tefillah. However, an entire region or country, such as Spain or Germany, should recite vesein tal umatar in birchas hashanim during the part of the year that this region requires rain.

Kesef Mishneh and Toras Chayim

Not all authorities accept the Rosh's approach to explaining the Rambam. Several point out that if the Rambam meant to distinguish between a city and a region, he should have said so. Rather, they contend that the Rambam meant that if, in your location, there is now a need for rain, one should include vesein tal umatar in your daily weekday davening. Where in the prayer one recites this depends on what part of the year it is: Between the 7th of Marcheshvan and Pesach, one should say it in birchas hashanim. If it is after Pesach, one should recite it in shomei'a tefillah.

Several rishonim rule that local conditions do not determine when one recites vesein tal umatar in birchas hashanim, contending that reciting vesein tal umatar in that part of davening after Pesach requires one to repeat the shemoneh esrei, even in a place where there is a need for rain in this part of the year (Rabbeinu Yonah, Brochos 19b; Ritva, Taanis 3b). Thus, we understand why the Rosh's position that mashiv haruach umorid hagashem and vesein tal umatar should be recited after Pesach in Europe was not accepted.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 117:2) rules that the halacha does not follow the Rosh. He writes that all communities begin reciting mashiv haruach umorid hagashem on Shemini Atzeres and records only two practices regarding vesein tal umatar, the same two expressly mentioned in the Gemara. No other regional distinctions are recognized.

Thus, in essence, the people of Brazil wanted to follow the approach of the Rosh. The Toras Chayim rules that they should not follow this practice, emphasizing:

- (1) The Rosh's approach was not accepted by the other authorities.
- (2) In a lengthy discussion of the Rambam's opinion, the Toras Chayim concludes that the Rambam also does not agree with the Rosh.
- (3) The Rosh himself retracted his approach when he saw that it was not followed.

Based on the claim that rain between Sukkos and Pesach was detrimental to life where these Brazilian colonists lived, the Toras Chayim ruled that they should never recite mashiv haruach umorid hagashem at all, following the Rambam that one does not recite either mashiv haruach umorid hagashem or vesein tal umatar when it is detrimental for the local needs. During the months that the Brazilians need rain, he ruled that they should recite vesein tal umatar during shomei'a tefillah, like the practice of the city of Nineveh and unlike the Rosh.

Be'ezras Hashem, I will complete this article next week...