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From TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>
Oct 18, 2013
Rabbi Mayer Twersky - The Need for Tefillah

We commonly respond to requests to pray on other people's behalf. A friend or perhaps simply an acquaintance will ask us to daven for his friend or relative who is ill, undergoing surgery, and the like. We submit names for such individuals and the gabbai makes a mi shebeirach on their behalf. Commonplace, benevolent practices that we take for granted, and yet the basis for such prayer needs to be elucidated. Maharal, in his Nesiv Ha'avodah chapter twelve, questions the admissibility of such prayer. Maharal opines that possibly one can not pray exclusively on behalf of others, as we ostensibly regularly do in the above scenarios.

At first glance, Maharal's position is very puzzling. Must tefillah be self-centered? Moreover, does not the Torah provide examples of such altruistic prayer - Avraham Avinu on behalf of Avimelech and his household and the people of Sedom, Moshe Rabbeinu on behalf of Miriam and consistently for Bnai Yisroel?

In order to understand and appreciate the beauty of Maharal's position we must first understand the gift and obligation of prayer. Rambam in defining the mitzvah of tefillah writes that after reciting the praise of HKB"H, "sho'el tzrachav she'hu tzarich lahen". Translated literally if unidiomatically, "a person asks for his needs that he needs". Now admittedly Rambam's formulation in the original Hebrew does not grate as it does in the clumsy English translation, but the apparent redundancy is definitely present in Rambam's own words. In truth, of course, there is no actual redundancy. Rambam is expressing that in order to pray one must experience need. One must feel needy, dependent. It does not suffice for a person to know intellectually that he has tzrochim (needs). He must feel those needs in order to daven ("hu tzarich lahein") for this is an indispensable element of prayer - turning to HKB"H out of a sense of need, dependence and vulnerability. An individual who feels smug and self-sufficient can turn pages in the prayer book and mouth all the words; but he can not pray.

Operating with Rambam's beautiful, religiously sensitive definition of she'eilas tzrochim (request, petition) within prayer, we can appreciate the position of the Maharal. It is not that tefillah should be self-centered; self-centeredness is not a virtue. But tefillah must emanate from a sense of need. If one does not experience need, he can not pray. Hence, one can not with a sense of detachment pray exclusively for another individual's needs.

But the second question remains. Avraham Aivnu did so, Moshe Rabbeinu did so. The answer lies in a famous story about the tzaddik of Yerushalayim, Reb Aryeh Levin. He once accompanied his wife who was experiencing pain in her knee to a doctor. Explaining the reason for the visit he told the doctor, "our knee hurts." Reb Aryeh Levin's sense of empathy was such that he experienced his wife's (and other people's) needs as his own.

This empathetic experience, says the Chasam Sofer by way of explaining the Maharal (responsa Orach Chaim 166), allows us to daven on behalf of others. When, with love and compassion, we experience their needs as our own we are able to daven on their behalf. Avraham Aivnu did so, Moshe Rabbeinu did so, and it is our challenge to do so as well!

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http://www.rabbidov.com/parsha%20commentaries/vayera.htm
Rav Dov Fischer
Parsha Commentaries Parshat Vayera
The Kids Are Watching

This week's Torah portion, Vayera, begins with our Patriarch Avraham sitting outdoors, in front of his tent, recovering from his recent circumcision. Hashem is visiting with him, thereby teaching and modeling for us the mitzvah of bikur cholim – visiting the sick. In Tractate Sotah 14a, the Talmud teaches us that we are commanded to walk in Hashem's ways. Thus, as Hashem clothed the naked Adam and Eve, so we should clothe the naked and care for the needy. He comforted Yitzchak, when he mourned Avraham's passing, and therefore we should comfort mourners. He attended to the burial of Moshe on Mount Nevo, and we therefore should attend to the last needs of the deceased.

With Avraham in recovery mode, he nevertheless camps himself outside, hoping to see wayfarers whom he can invite into his abode for something to eat, some reason to articulate an affirmation of thanks and gratitude to the one true Master of the Universe. Along come three men – messengers of Hashem, we are told by our tradition – and Avraham invites them in. But first he brings them water, inviting them to wash the sand and dust off their feet. (Breishit 18:4)

Later, within the same Torah portion, we read that two of the three Divine messengers resume trekking and reach Sodom, their mission's ultimate destination. There they are met by Lot, the nephew of Avraham. Our tradition teaches that Lot was raised by his uncle Avraham after his own father, Haran (11:27), died a terrible death in Nimrod's fiery furnace. Lot invites these men into his home, to spend the night, and further invites them to wash their feet in the morning. (19:2)

Although many customs and lifestyle nuances appear in the course of the Tanakh (our Bible), this business of inviting visiting strangers to wash their feet seems striking. Not only Avraham and Lot, but others in the Tanakh began their home hospitality by offering wayfarers water to wash their feet. Thus, Avraham's Damascene servant, Eliezer, was offered water to wash his feet when he arrived at the home of Betuel, father of Rivkah, the young girl whom he perceived perfect to marry Yitzchak. (24:32) We later see that, when Joseph's brothers were invited into his home, the home of the Egyptian Viceroy, they promptly were given water to wash their feet. (43:24)

These are the traditions and niceties of a people who became proficient at welcoming wayfarers. The very act of inviting the traveling stranger into one's home took on the aspect of religious observance, accompanied by ritual.

Thus, we see in the water of foot-washing a hallmark of the house meant to welcome visitors, dining guests, even sleep-overs. And we see that, in our tradition, not only is hachnasat orchim a central mitzvah – another of those acts of kindness from which one eats the fruit in this world while enjoying the principal in the world to come (Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 127a) – but it is one more defining practice of our people, and other Children of Avraham, that sets us (and, in this case, our Arab cousins) apart from much of the world.

Which brings us back to the foot water. I imagine young Lot in my mind's eye –Lot, the nephew, in the home of Uncle Avraham and Aunt Sarah. Guests arrive. And soon the bowl of water for foot-washing is brought out. "Quick, get the water. We have guests. They're sleeping over. Clean up your bedroom. Get a towel. Get them water to wash their feet." I see the same nephew growing into a man, years later. He has made some bad choices, is camped out

in Sodom, married to a salty wife, with some daughters who have grown up in Sodom. It's a bad situation, a bad spiritual place, and he is not the quality of man that Avraham is. But he's got the foot water ready – because he grew up with the foot water. M'darft -- A person simply has to have foot water ready for guests.

It passes along the family through the generations. Avraham sends Eliezer back to the land where Avraham evolved many of his early values, forbidding the servant from selecting a bride locally from among the coarse Canaanites. Eliezer finds Rivkah, is invited to spend the night, and is welcomed with the foot water. By the time of Joseph, the palace has foot water for the visiting brothers. And, even in the horrific story of the Concubine of Giv'ah, the elderly man who unsuccessfully tries saving the wayfarers from the overnight doom that surely would have befallen them if they had camped outdoors in the town square, signals them with the foot water of hospitality. (Judges 19:21)

Nu – so what about your home? Do you host Shabbat sleep-overs? Do you regularly host guests for Shabbat meals? And, if you do, are your invitations geared primarily to your own circle of friends? Or do your children see you inviting wayfarers, strangers visiting the community? Do they see you adding your name to your local synagogue's Shabbat Home Hospitality list? Is yours a home open to strangers who contact your temple for a Shabbat meal?

Today, the symbols of hospitality more typically are the bedroom at the end of the hall, the face and bath towels, and an old blanket with pillow cases that don't match. But that's OK. Because, if it is part of their childhood, they will continue this wonderful tradition of hachnasat orchim when they have homes and households. They are watching you and learning. Just as you did your parents when you grew up. Just as Joseph. Just as Rivkah. Just as Lot. All continuing this remarkable tradition, so strangely unique in society, of housing unknown sleep-overs, feeding them, and footing the bill with joy.

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Ikea

The Swedish furniture maker IKEA made the headlines this past week, even though it was an innocent bystander to the war of words between the Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and his female Swedish counterpart. Reacting to Sweden's recognition of a Palestinian state on the West Bank, Lieberman caustically said that "the Middle East and the Palestinian – Israeli dispute is slightly more complicated than is assembling an IKEA furniture product."

IKEA is the famous Swedish company that manufactures all types of furniture that the buyers must then assemble themselves using their own talents and time. IKEA has a number of large stores here in Israel and is a very popular product worldwide.

The Swedish Foreign Minister responded to Lieberman's thrust by stating that she would be happy to send Lieberman an IKEA product but that he has to realize that in order to assemble it, he definitely needs the willing cooperation of a partner and a manual to instruct them in its proper assembly.

As of this writing, there the matter apparently rests. However, if I were Lieberman, which thank God I am not, I would have a wistful but pointed rejoinder to this generous offer of the Foreign Minister of Sweden. I would tell her that I would gladly accept any type of IKEA solution and product here in our section of the world but I would appreciate it if she could also tell me who my willing cooperative partner will be to help me with the assembly, and if she could tell me if she also has a manual of instructions.

Even she admits that one cannot assemble an IKEA product alone and that there must be some reasonable explanation as to how to put the disparate parts together so that the finished product does not collapse. All our previous efforts to assemble such an IKEA-like solution with the Arab world have collapsed shortly after the assembly project was completed and celebrated.

IKEA provides a warranty with its products. All of the do-gooders who have Israel's true welfare at heart and are always trying to save us Israelis from ourselves with "tough love," have never provided us with any warranty as to the product they wish us to assemble.

In fact, when push comes to shove, they are rarely heard from afterwards and usually just withdraw into their smug posture of fairytale unreality. It should be obvious to all by now that Abbas and the Palestinian Authority are not willing, cooperative partners in trying to achieve a just and lasting settlement of a century-old dispute.

The constant incitement, propaganda, spewed hatred and dire threats that emanate daily from the leaders and spokespersons of the Palestinian Authority hardly make them our partners in any sort of endeavor, let alone in arriving at a peaceful settlement, which will require concessions and compromise on all sides.

We have tried numerous times to assemble this IKEA-like solution by ourselves. Israel has withdrawn from territory, dismantled settlements, exiled thousands of its own citizens, released hundreds of murderers from prison (so that they can murder again) all in a vain attempt to arrive at a permanent settlement of our conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab world generally.

All of our efforts to assemble this solution have failed dismally and all previous agreements and unilateral concessions forced on Israel are tainted by the blood of thousands of victims of these failed policies and false assembly instructions. There is no unilateral way to assemble an IKEA product.

It would seem equally obvious that when IKEA issues a manual of instructions for assembly of its products and subsequently those products continually collapse, that IKEA would rethink its assembly process and provide a newer and much more accurate manual for its customers.

What is true for IKEA should also be true for the governments and diplomats of the world, especially Sweden. If the old manual is proven to be inaccurate and of little value, then perhaps our "tough love" friends should rethink the issues and come up with new and better suggestions and insights as to how this dispute can, if ever, be settled. And if they are unable to do so, then perhaps silence and patience should be the order of the day on their part.

Thomas Friedman, a columnist for the New York Times hardly known to be pro-Israel, recently wrote that he understands why it is perfectly logical and legitimate for Israel to maintain the current status quo in its dealings with the Palestinian Authority and the surrounding Arab world. He naturally bemoans the fact that this is the situation and wants Israel to come up with new creative thinking to break the logjam.

He apparently has no new creative thinking to bring to the table, since all of the previous solutions have proven to be broken shards. I wish IKEA all the success in the world and I hope that the Foreign Minister of Sweden would indeed provide us with a willing cooperative partner and an accurate manual of instructions that would ease the situation in which we find ourselves.

Shabbat shalom

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Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

Vayera

For the Jewish people, one of the hallmarks of our great founding parents was their ability to maintain communication with their Creator. God, so to speak, was a constant living presence in their lives, thoughts and actions. And they were able to hear God's voice, though God has no voice, and to visualize God even though God has no physical appearance. God spoke to them through the inner voice of their own souls which was always longing to reunite with the source of life from which it came.

When the stranger/angel guest informs Avraham and Sarah about the forthcoming birth of their son, this serves to confirm to Avraham the promise that he heard from God earlier regarding the same event. Previously Avraham heard it through his own inner voice of faith and attachment to God and now he and Sarah hear it in a literal sense, from the lips of the stranger/angel who stands before them in their tent.

Midrash explains and reinforces this idea of hearing God through one's own soul and spirit. When Moshe was sent on his mission to redeem Israel from Egypt

and to teach them Torah, he heard that call emanate from Heaven in the voice of his father Amram.
We hear God, so to speak, through familiar voices that reverberate within our soul and heart. First, Avraham himself believes that he will have a son with Sarah and later he has no doubts when that message is communicated to him by the stranger/angel.
Sarah, on the other hand, who did not spiritually "hear" these tidings beforehand, casts doubt and wonderment at the words of the stranger/angel. Avraham is made aware of this and explains to Sarah the source of her consternation.
I feel that many times in our lives we sense within ourselves a divine message and voice. It is this combination of soul and intellect that drives all human hopes forward. But, since we are not at the level of constant communication with our soul and our Creator, we do not always hearken to that voice nor do we attribute it to its correct source.
Jewish tradition teaches us that somehow the prophet Elijah appears regularly and constantly to human beings. He comes in different guises, forms and costumes. The truly righteous are able to identify him when he appears while we ordinary human beings are mostly unaware of his presence even as he stands before us.
Avraham, in his righteousness and faith, is constantly prepared for such encounters with God. Ordinary human beings, to whom God is at best an abstract idea, certainly are unable to truly sense His presence. That is what the great rebbe of Kotzk meant when he said that when God said: "Go forth from your land and home and family" any human being had the potential to hear that message, not just Avraham. But unless one is attuned to "hear" God regularly through one's own inner soul, all heavenly messages will fall on deaf ears.
Shabbat shalom

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
to: weekly@ohr.edu
subject: Torah Weekly
Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayera
For the week ending 8 November 2014 / 15 Heshvan 5775
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights
A Genius At Hiding His Genius
"Avraham returned to his young men; they rose up and went together to Be'er Sheva." (22:19)
Humility is the only virtue that can be possessed only subconsciously. Once a person is aware of his humility, it turns immediately into the worst kind of conceit.
The mark of the truly great is how totally unaware of how great they are.
In the town of Radin, there was a fellow in his fifties who never quite managed to get married. Yom Kippur was a very lonely time for him. In Europe, the Kol Nidrei service would finish well before nine o'clock and people would return to their homes. On Shabbat and Yom Tov he had lno ack of meal invitations, but on Kol Nidrei evening there was no meal to which he could be invited. For this poor fellow it was the loneliest night of the year.
One year on Kol Nidre evening he was sitting in the shul long after everyone had gone home. He leaned forward, his forehead on his arm, and started to gently weep. After a few moments, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked up and found himself looking into the eyes of the Chafetz Chaim. The Chafetz Chaim asked him if he could sit down. He said yes. The Chafetz Chaim proceeded to talk to this fellow about every subject under the sun: his family, the weather — anything to lighten this fellow's spirits. No subject seemed too trivial for the Chafetz Chaim to speak about.
They spoke for a very long time indeed. In fact they spoke the whole night long. About this. About that. The entire night.
It was clear to the Chafetz Chaim that his avoda (Divine service) this Yom Kippur was not to be immersed in prayer and teshuva, but to shoot the breeze with a simple fellow who was in need of warmth and friendship.
The truly great never make other people feel that they are less — because they honestly believe about themselves that they are no more than the others.
Rabbi Dov Schwartzman, zatzal, who passed away but a few years ago, was one of the greatest geniuses of his generation. Rabbi Moshe Shapiro eulogized him at his funeral, saying that there was no one who was ever like "Reb Dov", nor would there be anyone again.
And yet for all his greatness, he never let anyone feel less than him. I had the privilege to be close to him, and even though he was so far above me I never felt for a second that he looked down on me. Quite the opposite! He made me and everyone he met feel they were his equals. As Rabbi Shapiro said, he was a genius at hiding his genius.
In this week's Torah portion, it says that Avraham "went together with his young men." In a previous usage of this term, Rashi tells us that Avraham and Yitzchak "went together," meaning that when Yitzchak realized that he was to be the sacrifice, they nevertheless went as of one mind — Yitzchak as willingly as Avraham.
"Avraham returned to his young men; they rose up and went together to Be'er Sheva."
Given that these "young men" were the lowly Yishmael and Eliezer, how can we understand that they went of one mind? Did they too reach the sublime level of Avraham and Yitzchak on the way to the Akeida?
When Avraham and Yitzchak returned, they had succeeded in the greatest challenge and accomplished the most exalted mission; nevertheless, Yishmael and Eliezer had not an inkling of the lofty levels that had achieved.
Most people after such an experience would return very full of themselves and unable to relate to the ordinary and the mundane. Such was the greatness of Avraham and Yitzchak that they concealed it, to the extent that they all went "together" — Yishmael and Eliezer felt no different to them.
True greatness conceals itself.
Sources: Based on Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch as heard from Rabbi Shmuel Nosson Conick, and a story heard about the Chafetz Chaim from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Vayera

Avraham came forward and said, "Will You even obliterate righteous with wicked?" (18:23)
Avraham Avinu took the decree to obliterate Sodom seriously. Indeed, Rashi teaches that the word vayigash, "and (Avraham) came forward," has three connotations - each one apparently applying to our Patriarch. We find "coming forward" used with regard: to war; to conciliation; and to prayer. Avraham undertook all of these approaches. He spoke strongly, arguing forcefully to establish his point; he appealed to Hashem to have mercy; and he prayed. He did all of this for the people of Sodom! Why? These were the most reprehensible people of the time. They made life miserable for anyone who had the misfortune to spend a day in their "welcoming" community. They tortured the poor and brutally killed anyone who lent them assistance. Yet, Avraham was prepared to speak forcefully with Hashem on their behalf. How are we to understand this?
Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, contends that this is the result of rachmanus, pure compassion. Unadulterated sympathy, selfless pity on another human being, knows no bounds. It traverses race, color and level of evil. Regardless of a person's background, the baal rachmanus, compassionate person, cares deeply about the welfare of the other and reaches out to assist him, regardless of his past, present or future. Right here and now, he is in need. Hashem was about to issue a decree against the Sodomites. Avraham was well aware of their history, their evil, their blatant cruelty to others less fortunate than they. Yet, he prayed for them. Why? He pitied them.
Truthfully, we should not be taken aback by Avraham's behavior. His compassion parallels that of Hashem, Who came to Avraham knowing that the Patriarch would speak in their defense. Hashem has compassion for all of His

creatures, regardless of the unmitigating evil which some of them impose upon others. Avraham was only following suit.

If this is the case, why did Avraham not have the same compassion in his heart for the generation which built the Tower of Bavel? Chazal teach that the tower was built when Avraham was forty-eight years old. He saw what the people were doing, and he was acutely aware why they were building the tower, so he cursed them. He not only did not want them to succeed in building the tower, but he wanted to see them punished. Were they that much worse than the Sodomites for whom Avraham prayed?

Rav Sholom explains that the difference lies in the fact that Avraham saw with his own two eyes the sin which the dor haflagah had perpetrated. The sins of the Sodomites were hearsay, delivered by word of mouth from travelers. Additionally, Hashem informed him of their iniquity. At the end of the day, however, he did not actually see the Sodomites actively engaged in their nefarious behavior. Concerning the dor Haflagah, it was a different case altogether. He heard the tumult and saw the people building the tower. When one sees the sinner in action, it is much more difficult to justify his behavior, regardless of the spectator's level of compassion.

Perhaps we can offer an alternative reason for Avraham's lack of compassion for the dor Haflagah, although he had manifested incredible forbearance for the Sodomites. The sins were different. The Sodomites were terribly sadistic people. The lack of human decency and the brutality with which they treated the unfortunate person who fell into their hands were beyond cruel, but their deeds could somehow be defended, because to be such a victimizer one must himself have been a victim. A mean person must have been mistreated as a youth. A cruel person probably had once been the victim of cruelty. When the sin is one of inappropriate middos, defective character, there is always someone else upon whom to lay the blame. It may be compared to abuse in its many forms. The present-day abuser himself has at one time been a victim of abuse. Thus, it is not necessarily all his fault. There is room for compassion - regardless how far from deserving the sinner may seem to be.

The dor Haflagah was guilty of heresy. It was not the people's characters which were deficient; it was their minds. A person thinks what he wants to think, believes what he wants to believe. While it is true that environment plays a role in shaping one's thought process, an individual does not have to himself be a victim in order to victimize others. The evil of that generation was wrought against Hashem. Indeed, the people worked in a unified manner to build the tower upon which they would rebel against G-d. No mitigating circumstances warranted any sort of compassion for them. They were miscreants who deserved to be cursed, because they were undermining the Hand that was feeding them.

For G-d has heeded the cry of the youth as he is, there. (21:17)

Avraham Avinu had a son, Yishmael, who deviated from the derech, path, which his father had surely encouraged him to follow. Likewise, Yitzchak Avinu had a son, Eisav, who paved for himself a path to infamy. Two sons - two reshaim, wicked men; yet, Yishmael repented, while Eisav died as he had lived - a rasha. One might suggest that Yishmael was made of finer spiritual material, better middos, character traits. This is not true. The angel told Hagar that her son would be a pera adam, a wild man, similar to a wild donkey-- his hand in everything and everyone's hand against him. Yishmael would be a wild man, a bandit, reviled by everyone. This certainly does not speak well of his character traits. Indeed, the Chafetz Chaim, zl, addressed the concept of pera adam in association with the Arab riots of the late 1920's. These Arabs were a murderous scourge wreaking evil and brutality on any innocent person who happened to be in their way.

The sage disclosed that he would, indeed, have liked to go to Eretz Yisrael, but these people manifested a dual tzarah, trouble. He expounded that the angel designated Yishmael as a pera adam. The appellation seems to be presented in the wrong sequence. When we describe a person, he might be an adam savlan, patient man; adam ra, evil man; or adam kaasan, angry man; but, in all instances, the word adam precedes the epithet. Concerning Yishmael, it is the other way around; pera, wild, precedes the adam. The Chafetz Chaim explained that most people are first an adam, human being, and then the appellation follows, describing what kind of human being he is. Yishmael, however, was first a pera, wild animal. His humanness followed his savagery. The pera was his essence. The adam is the nickname. It is secondary to his savage nature.

As such, Yishmael the savage, despite growing up in Avraham's home, worshipped idols, murdered and plundered; he was driven away from home and went on to live in the wilderness as a thief who robbed travelers. Yet, later on in life, he repented.

Yitzchak's son, Eisav, seems to have been a much better-- certainly better behaved-- son. He respected his parents, yet went about his own way, as a hunter, philanderer, murderer, thief and idolater. Eisav took his evil to the grave. He never repented. What was the difference between these two sons who both had brothers that achieved the pinnacle of observance, reaching Patriarchal status? Their lives appear to have been similar. Yet, in death, one repented -and the other remained resolute in his evil.

The Alter, zl, m'Slabodka, Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, addresses this question. His response is compelling and certainly warrants its own discussion. He explains that the difference lies in the parental reaction to his son's evil. Avraham sent Yishmael away, despite the pain that this action incurred. Eisav continued to live at home, until that time that he chose to leave. At times, we must demonstrate that certain activities are unacceptable. It will hurt. It will appear to be cruel. It is what we might refer to as tough love. For the sake of the child, the parents have to make a painful decision. Yishmael finally came to terms with his iniquitous behavior, understanding that his father had done what was best for him, and, eventually, he repented.

Eisav had it all. He lived like the rasha that he was, yet remained home, seemingly not receiving any consequences or chastisement for his behavior. He probably thought that he had gotten away with it. Why, then, should he repent? After all, what did he do wrong? If he could pull the proverbial wool over his father's eyes, why could he not do the same to everyone else? Repenting is only for those who are weak at heart.

We elaborate on this concept of tough love, an idea that has been popularized by the secular world. As pointed out by Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski, however, the concept of tough love heralds back to ben sorer u'morer, wayward and rebellious son, whose parents literally turn him into bais din, Jewish court, for punishment. As a practicing psychiatrist, Dr. Twerski states that the only way that a person who is plagued by an addiction will eventually be cured is through tough love. The parents, at times, must act as if they are insensitive and uncaring - when, in truth, they are tearing themselves apart. Hashem is all merciful. Yet, in the Torah, He advocates that the parents of the wayward and rebellious son take their child to court, which, likely, means having him executed. Hashem knows that the punishment is merciful in comparison to the alternative.

While the concept of applying tough love must be tailored to every case individually, at times it is necessary, but it should be carried out only under the advice of a competent, experienced professional. Every child is different; every situation is different. This is not a "one size fits all" cure. It is to be used only in extreme situations which call for such radical "therapy".

We are living during a period in which we see good boys and girls from wonderful G-d-fearing homes wandering off the path of observance. There is no longer such a phenomenon of a stereotypical family which has among its offspring a child whose sense of security has plunged so low that he or she must do "something else" to garner attention, to cry out from the pain they suffer. It can happen - and does happen - in the finest and the best families, that adolescents and teenagers, often in genuine distress, act out-- or act on-- their miseries. They feel a lack of acceptance in their community, their shul, their school, so they go elsewhere - where they feel secure. This is neither the place, nor the forum, for addressing the multifold issues involved. This is a job for the professionals far more qualified than I. While on the subject of Eisav and Yishmael and the concept of tough love, however, I reminded myself of a story I wrote a number of years ago, which has lost neither its impact nor its timeliness.

Parents never cease loving their child, despite the immeasurable heartache and agony they experience when the child rebels. Some parents are stronger than others; thus, they continue trying, hoping, long after the average person would have given up. The following letter was penned by someone who "made it back." It is a son's tribute to a father who suffered the agony, made a tough

decision, and was fortunate enough to see that his everlasting love made a difference. The father refused to give up on his own son - even though, for all intents and purposes, the casual spectator looking through a myopic lens might not have thought so.

"Until a few years ago, I did not take anything seriously. I was not like the rest of my class. Having graduated from yeshivah high school, I was undecided about what to do next. I was neither interested in continuing my Jewish education, nor was I ready to begin college right away. I thought I would just drift around for a while and then get a job.

"My parents were obviously not very pleased with my decision, but, at that point, what my parents wanted did not carry much weight in my life.

Regrettably, during this time, I fell in with a group of like-minded fellows who were not Orthodox. At first, I figured that they would not influence me, but I was dead wrong. It did not take long before I became like them: no interest in Judaism. Shabbos and kashrus became relics of my past. Indeed, my entire life became a haze: no direction, no meaning, no value.

"My parents were devastated. While they did not expect me to become a rabbi, they certainly did not expect this. As well as having destroyed my life, I was on the way to destroying my family. It got to the point that, due to the adverse influence I was having on my younger siblings, my father asked me to leave the house. When I moved out, I said some cruel and vicious things to my father. I can remember him standing silently by the door, with my mother crying at his side.

"Looking back, I realize that what I saw in them as a weakness was actually incredible strength of character. A year went by, and I had no contact with anyone in my family. I missed them very much, but I was afraid that, if I contacted them, it would be perceived as a weakness on my part.

"One morning, I was shocked to find my father standing outside the door to my apartment building. He looked at me with tired, worn eyes and asked if we could talk. I was stubborn and obnoxious. I only nodded. We walked to a corner coffee shop, where we sat down to talk. My father opened up. He said that everyone missed me and that, despite my absence, I had been in their hearts and minds every moment that I was gone. I saw the hurt in his eyes, eyes that had long ago stopped crying - because he had no more tears. He told me how my mother agonized over what had happened, blaming herself for not having been there for me. Why did he come? He came because he had one last request: no lecture; just one last favor. He wanted me to drive with him to Monsey, New York, to recite Tehillim at the grave of a certain tzaddik. I looked at him incredulously, and then he began to cry. Bitter tears streamed down his face, as he asked me to please grant him this one request. As far removed as I was from Yiddishkeit, I was still moved by his request.

"I told my father that that particular day was impossible, because I had plans to go with my friends to Atlantic City that night. I would go with him another time. He reached across the table and took my hands in his, looking at me with his tear-streaked, sad face. He said nothing - just stared and wept. I felt my own eyes begin to water, and - rather than have him see me cry - I just agreed to meet him later on that day.

"I made the necessary apologies to my friends. Atlantic City would have to wait. Later on that day, I drove with my father up to the cemetery in Monsey. We did not talk much during the trip. I remember getting out of the car with my father and walking over to one of the graves. He placed some rocks on top of the grave and gave me a Tehillim. Anybody who walked by would have seen a bizarre sight: my father - standing there in his long black frock, a black hat perched on his head; and me - with my leather bomber jacket and jeans. We did not stay long. Ten minutes is all it took, and soon we were on our way back. We talked as much on the return trip as on the way in - very little.

"My father dropped me off and walked me to my apartment building. I will never forget the words he told me that day. He said, regardless of what had occurred between us, and no matter what might happen in the future, I was always going to be his son, and he would always love me. I was emotionally moved by his words, but I did not manifest the spiritual inspiration that he hoped would occur that day. I shook my head at his words, and we parted company.

"The next morning I woke up to some shocking news. On their return trip from Atlantic City, my friends had been involved in a head-on collision with a tractor-trailer rig. They did not survive the accident. Had I not gone with my father that day, I would have been in that car.

"As I write this letter, I am overwhelmed with emotion. I made a Bris for my bechor, firstborn, today. My father was sandek, and, as he held my son on his lap, our eyes met, and we smiled. It was as if we had finally reached the end of a long arduous journey.

"We have never talked about that trip to the cemetery; nor did I ever tell my father about my friends' untimely death. I just walked into their home that evening and was welcomed with open arms. No questions asked, no accusations, no answers. I just know that, sitting here late at night with my son in my arms, I will try to be the father to him that my father was to me."

Returning to our original question, we may suggest another difference between Eisav and Yishmael. Shlomo Hamelech says (Mishlei 19:25), "When you smite the scorner, the na?ve one will become prudent." There is a leitz, scorner, whom the Midrash (Rabbah Shemos 27:6) says refers to Amalek; and a pesi, imprudent one, whose sin is different, and thus, does not require the same punishment. Why is Amalek referred to as a leitz? He is the archetype of evil; a rasha - not a leitz.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, explains that a leitz is someone who looks for a weakness in any edifice/organization/endeavor of importance with the express goal of demolishing the entire structure. Amalek, who "coincidently" was Eisav's grandson, sought to undermine the miracles Hashem wrought for us, to transform that which was significant and compelling into something inconsequential. Maharal explains that Amalek personifies a nation that takes reality and divests it of its distinction, converting it into nihility, casting it to oblivion.

Amalek inherited the denigration gene from his grandfather, Eisav. The very significance of a person meant nothing to him. His persona pompously gave him the platform from which to expound and put down anyone and everything. He did not necessarily act sinfully. He first transformed his desired activity into something "good." So, why should he repent?

Yishmael, on the other hand, was a pesi, an imprudent son, who acted without thinking; albeit acting out his evil fantasies, he did not live for the express purpose of committing evil for evil's sake. He had his desires which he sought to satisfy. If, in the course of carrying them out, he broke the law and someone was hurt - too bad. He did not care - but, unlike Eisav, he did not plan it this way. He was simply imprudent - a pesi. At the right time, in the proper venue, he would repent.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear father and grandfather Arthur I. Genshaft Yitzchok ben Nachum Yisrael z"l niftar 18 Cheshvan 5739 -- Neil and Marie Genshaft, Isaac and Naomi

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column

Lech Lecha: "Ancestral Decisions"

Most people do not give much thought to their ancestral origins. But some do, and I am one of them. I often wonder about my grandparents and their grandparents. Who were they? What was their world like?

Most of all, I wonder about the decisions that they made, and whether those decisions had any bearing upon my life. Suppose they had made different decisions? Would my life be any different? Would I even be here to wonder?

In my case, I knew all my grandparents and even one great-grandmother. I know a little bit about some of my other great-grandparents, including the man after whom I was named. His name was Tzvi Hersh Kriegel, and I will always remember the portrait of him in a derby hat and long red beard, prominently adorning the dining room wall in my grandparents' home.

Somewhere back in the late 19th century, he made a decision. I know nothing of the details of that decision. He chose to leave the eastern European shtetl where he was born and raised and made his way to the United States. Because of that decision, he and his descendants escaped the fate of most of the rest of his family. Had he not made that decision, I myself would have been one of the

millions of Hitler's victims. I would not be sitting at my desk writing this column.

Many of my other forbearers, and many of yours, dear reader, made similar decisions in their lives that determined the futures of their children and grandchildren. Reflecting upon this fact leads to many important life lessons, including the need to take one's own decisions very seriously.

In my case, I cannot go back more than three generations, so I'm not familiar with the decisions made by my ancestors much before the late 19th century. Others, like my wife Chavi, routinely refer to ancestors who lived in the 18th century and even earlier. They are still influenced by decisions made by those who came before them more than two centuries ago.

It remains true, however, that all Jewish people can trace their ancestry much further back than a couple of centuries. I am reminded of the retort uttered by the late Lubavitcher Rebbe to a disciple who proudly reported that he was tutoring several "Jews with no Jewish background." The Rebbe insisted that there was no such thing. "Those Jews," he exclaimed, "have the same Jewish background as you do. They are all children of Abraham and Sarah."

Indeed, we are all children of Abraham and Sarah, and we remain influenced by the consequences of their decisions. Study the weekly Torah portions beginning this week, and you will discover the extent to which we remain influenced by the decisions made by our patriarchs and matriarchs millennia ago.

This week's parsha, Parshat Lech Lecha (Genesis 12:1-17:27), begins with one such decision: Abraham and Sarah's resolve to leave their "native land and father's house" and proceed to the "land that I will show you," the land of Canaan. That decision which reverberated across the generations still sustains our commitment to the Holy Land.

There are some lesser-known decisions made by Abraham in this week's Torah portion. The first was his decision to personally intervene in a war conducted by four great world powers against five other kingdoms. What prompted Abraham to do so was the report that his kinsman, Lot, was taken captive by the invaders. Unlike some contemporary world leaders, Abraham immediately sprang into action.

Not having access to jet fighters and long range missiles, he "mustered his retainers, chanichav." He enlisted the help of 318 of those who had been "born into his household," raised and educated by him. He made the decision to draft his disciples into military service.

Was that a good decision? Not according to one view in the Talmud, Tractate Nedarim 32a: "Rabbi Avahu said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: Why was Abraham punished so that his children were enslaved in Egypt for 210 years? Because he used Torah scholars as his army!"

In Abraham's judgment, enlisting 318 of his disciples to help rescue innocent victims was a no-brainer. For Rabbi Avahu, however, Abraham's decision was a disaster of historical proportions. There is no doubt that Abraham's decision remains relevant down to this very day, perhaps even more urgently than ever before.

Our Torah portion continues with the narrative that describes the offer of the King of Sodom (whom Abraham defended and who had Abraham to thank for his survival) to "give me the persons, and take the booty for yourself." Abraham, ever meticulously ethical, declines the booty but also yields the persons to the king of Sodom.

A wise decision? Not according to another opinion in that Talmudic passage: "Rabbi Yochanan said that [Abraham's children were eventually enslaved in Egypt] because he impeded the ability of those persons from taking refuge under the wings of the Shechinah." That is, had Abraham insisted that the King of Sodom yield those "persons" to Abraham's care, they would eventually have converted to Abraham's monotheistic way of life.

Abraham had a dilemma. Was he to insist on his ethical principles and take no reward whatsoever, not persons and not booty, from the king of Sodom? Or should he have engaged in spiritual outreach and taken those prisoners into his own household? For Abraham, his ethical principles trumped his goal of encouraging pagans to convert to monotheism. For Rabbi Yochanan, on the other hand, Abraham missed a critical opportunity. This is yet another of Abraham's decisions with great implications for us today.

We are all children of Abraham and Sarah. In so many ways, their dilemmas remain our dilemmas. Rabbi Avahu and Rabbi Yochanan taught us that we cannot merely emulate their choices. We must assess their decisions, determine their validity, and then consider the extent to which our circumstances conform to theirs.

As we study the parsha each week, we must remember that we are not just reading Bible stories. We are studying ancestral decisions which continue to affect our daily lives in an uncanny way.

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The Binding of Isaac

"Take your son, your only son, the one you love—Isaac—and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." Thus begins one of the most famous episodes in the Torah, but also one of the most morally problematic.

The conventional reading of this passage is that Abraham was being asked to show that his love for God was supreme. He would show this by being willing to sacrifice the son for whom he had spent a lifetime waiting. Why did God need to "test" Abraham, given that He knows the human heart better than we know it ourselves? Maimonides answers that God did not need Abraham to prove his love for Him. Rather the test was meant to establish for all time how far the fear and love of God must go.[1]

On this principle there was little argument. The story is about the awe and love of God. Kierkegaard wrote a book about it, Fear and Trembling,[2] and made the point that ethics is universal. It consists of general rules. But the love of God is particular. It is an I-Thou personal relationship. What Abraham underwent during the trial was, says Kierkegaard, a "teleological suspension of the ethical," that is, a willingness to let the I-Thou love of God overrule the universal principles that bind humans to one another.

Rav Soloveitchik explained the episode in terms of his own well-known characterisation of the religious life as a dialectic between victory and defeat, majesty and humility, man-the-creative-master and man-the-obedient-servant.[3] There are times when "God tells man to withdraw from whatever man desires the most." We must experience defeat as well as victory. Thus the binding of Isaac was not a once-only episode but rather a paradigm for the religious life as a whole. Wherever we have passionate desire – eating, drinking, physical relationship – there the Torah places limits on the satisfaction of desire. Precisely because we pride ourselves on the power of reason, the Torah includes chukkim, statutes, that are impenetrable to reason. These are the conventional readings and they represent the mainstream of tradition. However, since there are "seventy faces to the Torah," I want to argue for a different interpretation. The reason I do so is that one test of the validity of an interpretation is whether it coheres with the rest of the Torah, Tanakh and Judaism as a whole. There are four problems with the conventional reading:

1.We know from Tanakh and independent evidence that the willingness to offer up your child as a sacrifice was not rare in the ancient world. It was commonplace. Tanakh mentions that Mesha king of Moab did so. So did Jepthah, the least admirable leader in the book of Judges. Two of Tanakh's most wicked kings, Ahaz and Manasseh, introduced the practice into Judah, for which they were condemned. There is archeological evidence – the bones of thousands of young children — that child sacrifice was widespread in Carthage and other Phoenician sites. It was a pagan practice.

2.Child sacrifice is regarded with horror throughout Tanakh. Micah asks rhetorically, "Shall I give my firstborn for my sin, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" and replies, "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." How could Abraham serve as a role model if what he was prepared to do is what his descendants were commanded not to do?

3.Specifically, Abraham was chosen to be a role model as a father. God says of him, "For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." How could he serve as a model father if he was willing to sacrifice his

child? To the contrary, he should have said to God: "If you want me to prove to You how much I love You, then take me as a sacrifice, not my child."

4.As Jews – indeed as humans – we must reject Kierkegaard's principle of the "teleological suspension of the ethical." This is an idea that gives carte blanche to a religious fanatic to commit crimes in the name of God. It is the logic of the Inquisition and the suicide bomber. It is not the logic of Judaism rightly understood.[4] God does not ask us to be unethical. We may not always understand ethics from God's perspective but we believe that "He is the Rock, His works are perfect; all His ways are just" (Deut. 32: 4). To understand the binding of Isaac we have to realise that much of the Torah, Genesis in particular, is a polemic against worldviews the Torah considers pagan, inhuman and wrong. One institution to which Genesis is opposed is the ancient family as described by Fustel de Coulanges in The Ancient City (1864)[5] and recently restated by Larry Siedentop in Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism.[6]

Before the emergence of the first cities and civilizations, the fundamental social and religious unit was the family. As Coulanges puts it, in ancient times there was an intrinsic connection between three things: the domestic religion, the family and the right of property. Each family had its own gods, among them the spirits of dead ancestors, from whom it sought protection and to whom it offered sacrifices. The authority of the head of the family, the paterfamilias, was absolute. He had power of life and death over his wife and children. Authority invariably passed, on the death of the father, to his firstborn son. Meanwhile, as long as the father lived, children had the status of property rather than persons in their own right. This idea persisted even beyond the biblical era in the Roman law principle of patria potestas. The Torah is opposed to every element of this worldview. As anthropologist Mary Douglas notes, one of the most striking features of the Torah is that it includes no sacrifices to dead ancestors.[7] Seeking the spirits of the dead is explicitly forbidden.

Equally noteworthy is the fact that in the early narratives succession does not pass to the firstborn: not to Ishmael but Isaac, not to Esau but Jacob, not to the tribe of Reuben but to Levi (priesthood) and Judah (kingship), not to Aaron but to Moses. The principle to which the entire story of Isaac, from birth to binding, is opposed is the idea that a child is the property of the father. First, Isaac's birth is miraculous. Sarah is already post-menopausal when she conceives. In this respect the Isaac story is parallel to that of the birth of Samuel to Hannah, like Sarah also unable naturally to conceive. That is why, when he is born Hannah says, "I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." This passage is the key to understanding the message from heaven telling Abraham to stop: "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son" (the statement appears twice, in Gen. 22: 12 and 16). The test was not whether Abraham would sacrifice his son but whether he would give him over to God.

The same principle recurs in the book of Exodus. First, Moses' survival is semi-miraculous since he was born at a time when Pharaoh had decreed that every male Israelite child should be killed. Secondly, during the tenth plague, when every firstborn Egyptian child died, the Israelite firstborn were miraculously saved. "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to Me, whether human or animal." The firstborn were originally designated to serve God as priests, but lost this role after the sin of the golden calf. Nonetheless, a memory of this original role still persists in the ceremony of pidyon ha-ben, redemption of a firstborn son. What God was doing when he asked Abraham to offer up his son was not requesting a child sacrifice but something quite different. He wanted Abraham to renounce ownership of his son. He wanted to establish as a non-negotiable principle of Jewish law that children are not the property of their parents.

That is why three of the four matriarchs found themselves unable to conceive other than by a miracle. The Torah wants us to know that the children they bore were the children of God rather than the natural outcome of a biological process. Eventually, the entire nation of Israel would be called the children of God. A related idea is conveyed by the fact that God chose as his spokesperson Moses who was "not a man of words." He was a stammerer. Moses became God's spokesman because people knew that the words he spoke were not his own but those placed in his mouth by God. The clearest evidence for this interpretation is given at the birth of the very first human child. When she first gives birth, Eve says: "With the help of the Lord I have acquired [kaniti] a man." That child, whose name comes from the verb "to acquire," was Cain who became the first murderer. If you seek to own your children, your children may rebel into violence.

If the analysis of Fustel de Colanges and Larry Siedentop is correct, it follows that something fundamental was at stake. As long as parents believed they owned their children, the concept of the individual could not yet be born. The fundamental unit was the family. The Torah represents the birth of the individual as the central figure in the moral life. Because children – all children – belong to God, parenthood is not ownership but guardianship. As soon as they reach the age of maturity (traditionally, twelve for girls, thirteen for boys) children become independent moral agents with their own dignity and freedom.[8]

Sigmund Freud famously had something to say about this too. He held that a fundamental driver of human identity[9] is the Oedipus Complex, the conflict between fathers and sons as exemplified in Aeschylus' tragedy. By creating moral space between fathers and sons, Judaism offers a non-tragic resolution to this tension. If Freud had taken his psychology from the Torah rather than from Greek myth, he might have arrived at a more hopeful view of the human condition.

Why then did God say to Abraham about Isaac: "Offer him up as a burnt offering"? So as to make clear to all future generations that the reason Jews condemn child sacrifice is not because they lack the courage to do so. Abraham is the proof that they do not lack the courage. The reason they do not do so is because God is the God of life, not death. In Judaism, as the laws of purity and the rite of the Red Heifer show, death is not sacred. Death defiles.

The Torah is revolutionary not only in relation to society but also in relation to the family. To be sure, the Torah's revolution was not fully completed in the course of the biblical age. Slavery had not yet been abolished. The rights of women had not yet been fully actualised. But the birth of the individual – the integrity of each of us as a moral agent in our own right – was one of the great moral revolutions in history.

[1] Guide for the Perplexed 3: 24.

[2] Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, and the Sickness Unto Death. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954.

[3] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Majesty and Humility," Tradition 17:2, Spring. 1978, pp. 25–37.

[4] This is a large subject in its own right, that I hope to be able to address elsewhere.

[5] Fustel De Coulanges, The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956.

[6] Larry Siedentop, Inventing the Individual. London: Penguin, 2014.

[7] Mary Douglas, Leviticus as Literature. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

[8] It is perhaps no accident that the figure who most famously taught the idea of "the child's right to respect" was Janusz Korczak, creator of the famous orphanage in Warsaw, who perished together with the orphans in Treblinka. See Tomek Bogacki, The Champion of Children: The Story of Janusz Korczak (2009).

[9] He argued, in Totem and Taboo, that the Oedipus complex was central to religion also.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

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Chesed: Acts of Loving-Kindness

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

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 Moseh of Kobrin, zt'l once said 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 him 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 those 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 for the opportunity to perform acts of loving-kindness. Failing to do so leaves him tormented and troubl

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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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Vayera

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Meting Justice - Meeting Kindness

In what must be one of the greatest transitional scenes in the entire Biblical narrative, this week the Torah transposes us from the gracious home of Avraham in one scene and to the evil city of S'dom in the next. Avraham's home was one of kindness. It was a home where the master of the house would run to greet nomadic wanderers, and invite them into his abode only three days after a bris milah! It was a home in which Sora had opened a door in every direction, ensuring that there was an unrestricted invitation to any wayfarer, no matter which direction he or she came from.

The scene switches to S'dom, a city in which kindness and charity were unheard of. A city in which a damsel who committed the terrible crime of feeding a pauper, was smeared with honey and set out for the bees. Sdom was a city where visitors who had the audacity to ask for overnight lodging were treated to a special type of hospitality. They were placed in beds, and then, if they were too short for the beds, their limbs were tortuously stretched to fit the bed; if they were larger than the beds their limbs were chopped off.

How does the Torah make the transition from the world of kindness and charity to the world of evil? The Parsha tells us the story of three angels who visited Avraham. Each had a mission. Rashi tells us, "one to announce to Sarah the birth of a son, one to overthrow Sodom, and one to cure Abraham." You see, three were needed as one angel does not carry out two commissions. "Raphael," explains Rashi, "who healed Abraham went on to rescue Lot, as healing and saving may be one mission." And so the scene moves from Avraham in Eilonai Mamrei to Lot in S'dom, where the angels posing again as wayfarers were graciously invited. They saved the hospitable Lot and destroyed the rest of the city.

I have a simple question. Why did the angel who was sent to destroy S'dom make a stop at Avraham's home? Two angels could have gone to Avraham's home, one to heal Avraham and the other to inform Sora of the good news. The third could have gone directly to S'dom and waited there for the others to catch up. Why make a detour to Avraham?

Traditionally, young children who start learning Talmud, are introduced to Tractate Bava Metzia in general and the chapter Eilu M'tziyos in particular. The tractate deals with property law and emphasizes respect for other people's possessions. Eilu M'tziyos stresses the laws of returning lost items and the responsibilities of a finder of those objects. Some wanted the boys to learn about the blessings, but Rav Moshe Feinstein insisted that the custom not be changed. He wanted to imbue the youngsters of the enormous responsibilities that they have to their fellow man. One cannot be a Jew only in shul where he can sway,

pray, and recite blessings, but one must also be also be a Jew in the outside world, where the tests of honesty arise each day.

I heard the story of one of those youngsters, who found his way off the beaten yeshiva path. His college-years search for spirituality found him studying with a yogi in Bombay, India who railed against Western comforts and derided the culture of materialism. He preached peace, love, and harmony while decrying selfishness and greed. The young man was enamored with his master's vociferous objections to Western society, until he was together with him on a Bombay street. A wallet lay on the ground. There was cash and credit cards sticking out from it. It was clearly owned by an American tourist. The Yogi picked it up and put it in his sarong. "But it may belong to someone," protested his young charge. "It is a gift from the gods," he answered, "heaven meant it for us . . . ." The young man's protests fell on deaf ears.

At that moment, the words of his Rabbi back in fifth grade rang in his ears. "These are the items that must be announced for return; any item with an identifying sign . . . ."

He was stirred by truth of his traditions, and the purity of his past. He left the Yogi and the wallet, and eventually returned to a Torah life.

It is easy to rail against others. It is easy to talk about loose morals and unethical behavior. It's even easy to destroy Sdom. But Hashem did not let the angels do just that. He told them all to them first visit Avraham. He wanted them to see what kindness really means. See an old man run to greet total strangers. See a 90-year-old woman knead dough to bake you fresh bread. Meet the man who will plead for mercy on behalf of S'dom. And then, and only then can you mete the punishment that they truly deserve. Because without studying the good, we cannot understand the true flaws of the bad. Without watching Abraham commit true kindness, we should not watch the inhabitants of Sdom get their due.

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Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Vayeira: The Binding of Isaac

The great merit of Abraham's trial of the Akeidah (the Binding of Isaac) is mentioned repeatedly in our prayers. It is a theme of central importance to Judaism. Yet one could ask a simple question: What is so profound, so amazing about the Akeidah? After all, it was common among certain pagan cults to sacrifice children (such as the idolatry of Molech). In what way did Abraham show greater love and self-sacrifice than the idol-worshippers of his time?

Monotheism on Trial

Rav Kook addressed this issue in a letter penned in 1911. The absolute submission that idolatry demanded - and received - was not just a result of primitive mankind's fearful attempts to appease the capricious gods of nature. Even the most abject paganism reflects the truth of the soul's deep yearnings for closeness to God. Even the most abase idolatry contains profound awareness that the Divine is more important than anything else in life.

With the introduction of Abraham's refined monotheism in the world, it was necessary to counter the objection of paganism: can the Torah's abstract concept of God compete with the tangible reality of idols? Can monotheism produce the same raw vitality, the same passionate devotion, as paganism? Or is it merely a cold, cerebral religion - theologically correct, but tepid and uninspiring?

Through the test of the Akeidah, Abraham demonstrated to the world that, despite the intellectual refinement of his teachings, his approach lacked none of the religious fervor and boundless devotion to be found in the wildest of pagan rites. His refined Torah could match idolatry's passion and fire without relying on primitive imagery and barbaric practices.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 49-50. Adapted from Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. II, p. 43)

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Making Dairy Bread

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The menu of what Avraham served his guests included both dairy and meat, provided an opportunity to discuss the question concerning whether one may prepare *milchig* bread.

> **Question #1: The whey to celebrate Shavuos!**
> "May I add dairy ingredients to bread that I intend to serve with a *milchig* meal on Shavuos?**"**
> **Question #2: No pareve bread in sight!**
> "Is one permitted to eat the local bread when everyone knows it is *milchig*?"

Answer:

Each of the above actual questions involves our understanding the prohibition created by *Chazal* against making bread containing either dairy or meat ingredients. In several places, the *Gemara* quotes a *beraisa* that prohibits using milk as an ingredient in dough, and states further that, if one added milk to dough, the bread produced is prohibited from being eaten at all, even as a cheese sandwich. This rabbinic injunction is because of concern that one might mistakenly eat the dairy bread together with meat. The *Gemara* rules the same regarding baking bread directly on an oven hearth that was greased with kosher beef fat – it is prohibited to eat this bread, even as part of a corned beef sandwich (*Pesachim* 30a, 36a; *Bava Metzia* 91a; *Zevachim* 95b). If one greased a hearth with beef fat, one must *kasher* it properly before one uses it to bake bread.

Is one ever permitted to make dairy or meaty bread?

The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 36a) permits an exception – one may make dairy dough if it is *ke'ein tora*, "like a bull's eye."

Bull's eye

What does the *Gemara* mean when it permits dairy or meaty bread made like "a bull's eye?" Does this mean that some bakers double as excellent sharpshooters? We find a dispute among early *Rishonim* as to what the *Gemara* means when it says that one can prepare a dough like a bull's eye. *Rashi* explains it to mean that it is the size of a bull's eye -- one may bake a small amount of dairy or meaty bread that one would eat quickly. Since there will be no leftovers, we are not concerned that one may mistakenly use the dairy bread for a corned-beef sandwich or spread cream cheese on the *fleishig* bread.

Shapely bread

Other authorities explain that this refers to the shape of the dough. The *Gemara* means that if one shaped the dough like a bull's eye or some other unusual shape, the *heker* (here, distinguishable appearance) accomplishes that no one will mistakenly eat it with meat or dairy (*Rif, Chullin* 38a in his pages; *Rambam, Maachalos Asuros* 9:22).

How do we rule?

Although these are clearly two different ways of explaining the *Gemara*, the authorities conclude that there is no dispute in *halachah* between these two approaches (*Hagahos Shaarei Dura*, quoted by *Beis Yosef, Yoreh Deah* 97; *Shulchan Aruch* ad loc.). In other words, although **in general** one may not make dairy or meat bread because of the above-mentioned concerns, one may prepare a small amount of dairy or meaty bread. One is also permitted to make dairy or meaty bread with an unusual shape.

All the bread is *fleishig*

The *Maharit*, one of the great *halachic* authorities of sixteenth-century Israel, discussed the following situation: A specific town was located at quite a distance from any source of vegetable oil. As a result, vegetable cooking oil was expensive, and the townspeople, therefore, used beef tallow for all their baking, cooking and frying. (Apparently, the local cardiologist felt that the populace had a cholesterol deficiency – no doubt because they observed the Mediterranean Diet.) Indeed, the people in town always treated their bread as *fleishig*, since they assumed that it always included beef fat as an ingredient. The *Maharit* first discussed whether this provided sufficient reason to permit consuming local

bread in this town. Does the fact that all local residents know that their bread is *fleishig* preempt the *takkanas chachamim* prohibiting production of meaty bread?

Hometown advantage

The *Maharit* questioned whether this is sufficient reason to be lenient, since we still need to be concerned about visitors from out of town who are unaware that the local bread is *fleishig*. Indeed, some visitors had eaten local bread with cheese, not realizing that it contained a meat product. The *Maharit* concluded that local circumstances are insufficient grounds to permit *fleishig* bread – and that the local bread is permitted to be eaten only if it has a *heker*, or only if people make small quantities of bread (*Shu't Maharit* 2:18). This means that commercially-made bread in this town would be made exclusively with unusual shapes.

However, a later authority disputed this conclusion of the *Maharit*. Rav Yonasan Eibeschutz, in his commentary on *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* (*Kereisi* 97:2), mentions that in his town and environs all the white bread was made with milk, and the accepted custom was to bake, purchase and use even large quantities of the bread without any *heker*. He notes that, according to the *Maharit*, this bread is prohibited, yet he concludes that, notwithstanding the *Maharit's* opinion to the contrary, the bread is permitted, since everyone knows that the local bread is dairy and no baker in town produces *pareve* bread. He closes by mentioning that someone who is G-d fearing should not use the local dairy bread, although it is technically permitted.

Thus, whether one may permit *milchig* bread because all local bread is always *milchig*, or one may permit *fleishig* bread because all local bread is always *fleishig* is a dispute among prominent authorities.

Commercial bakery

A later authority, the *Kesav Sofer*, permitted a commercial bakery to produce *milchig* or *fleishig* bread, provided that the bakery sold only a small amount of bread to each customer. He contended that since the consumer only owns a small quantity of bread, we are not concerned how much the bakery actually produced.

Local bakery

In this context, I would like to share an anecdote. Many years ago, I was posed a question by a *rav* living in a small community that had no kosher bakery. He had the opportunity to provide a *hechsher* to a non-Jewish-owned bakery, which in his community would be very advantageous, since he would not need to be concerned about the bakery being open on *Shabbos* or on Pesach, or about *hafrashas challah* (all issues that I have discussed in other articles). The owner of the bakery was willing to meet all the ingredient requirements of the *hechsher*, and, in addition, was located within walking distance of the *frum* community, so that random inspections could take place even on *Shabbos*. The question germane to our topic was that the baker baked his white bread with milk, and the *rav* was uncertain whether and how to proceed with providing a *hechsher* to this bakery. According to the above-quoted *Kesav Sofer*, the *rav* could even provide a *hechsher* on the entire bakery, including the bread, and instruct people that they may purchase the *milchig* bread only in small quantities that would be eaten within a day.

However, according to the *Maharit*, the dairy bread should be treated as non-kosher. The *rav*'s decision was that the *hechsher* sign in the bakery would list which pastry items in the bakery are supervised as kosher/dairy, and which pastry and bread items are certified kosher/*pareve*, and that the sign would imply that the bakery sells breads that are not certified kosher because they are dairy. In this approach, he followed common custom not to rely on the *Kesav Sofer*'s leniency.

Are you in shape?

I mentioned above that one may make dairy or meat bread if it has an unusual shape. How unusual must the shape be?

As we can imagine, we are not the first to ask this question. In his above-mentioned responsum, the *Maharit* discusses what type of *heker* the *halachah* requires. He notes that there are two ways to explain what the *heker* accomplishes. One possibility is that the *heker* is so that people who know the bread is *fleishig* won't forget and mistakenly eat it with cheese. The second possibility is that the *heker* is necessary so that people from outside the area, who are unfamiliar with the fact that the bread is *fleishig*, will stop and ask why is this bread different from all the other bread in the rest of the world. In other words, according to the second approach, the *heker* must be sufficient to draw people's attention to it, so that they ask why this bread looks so strange.

The *Maharit* subsequently demonstrates that this exact point, what is the reason for the *heker*, is the subject of a *machlokes harishonim*. The *Tur* explains that the reason for the *heker* is so that the person remembers that this bread is *milchig* or *fleishig*, meaning that he already knew that he has made *milchig* or *fleishig* bread, and the *heker* is so that he does not make a mistake and accidentally eat the *milchig* bread with meat or eat the *fleishig* bread with dairy. This type of reminder does not require a major *heker* that would cause someone to ask: "Why does this bread look so strange?"

This approach of the *Tur* is quoted by a later authority, when the *Rama* (in *Toras Chatas* 60:2) states that the *heker* is so that one does not forget that he made *milchig* or *fleishig* bread.

Why is this bread so different from all other breads?

On the other hand, the second approach is mentioned in even earlier sources. When discussing the *heker* necessary in making *milchig* or *fleishig* bread, the *Rashba* explains that the *heker* must attract attention, so that people will notice that the bread looks different. The *heker* will cause people to ask, before eating, why the bread's appearance is so unusual (*Rashba, Toras Habayis Hakatzar*, 3:4, page 86b). Other later authorities, such as the *Levush* (*Yoreh Deah*, 97:1) and the *Chachmas Adam* (50:3) quote the *Rashba's* approach. To quote the *Chachmas Adam*, "One may make dairy bread if one changed the shape of the bread significantly, enough that one would not eat meat with it."

Baked for sale

The *Maharit* notes that a difference in *halachah* results from this dispute between the *Tur* and the *Rashba* concerning whether an item with a minor *heker* can be sold. If the reason is so that people will ask, there would need to be a major *heker*. Otherwise, one would not be permitted to make the bread. If the reason for a *heker* is to remind people that this bread was made dairy, a minor *heker* will suffice, as long as these breads are not sold, since visitors will eat them as guests in the houses of people who will know to serve them only with *fleishig* meals.

Bread for Shavuos

In a different ruling, the *Rama* again demonstrates that the *heker* is so that someone not forget that the bread he made is dairy. The *Rama* rules that one may make *challohs* for *Shavuos* with dairy ingredients, since the *challohs* for *Shavuos* are shaped long whereas the regular *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov challohs* are round. According to the approach of the *Rashba*, this difference in shape would not suffice, since someone visiting would not ask why the *challohs* are shaped long, and would not notice anything unusual to attract his attention. However, according to the *Tur*, who holds that the *heker* is so that one not forget, this difference in shaping is sufficient.

We have thus learned some of the laws of producing dairy and meaty breads. Stay tuned for the continuation of this article soon, as we continue exploring this meaty topic!!