

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA · 15 CHESHVAN 5771 · OCT. 23, 2010 · VOL. 18 NO. 4

PARSHA INSIGHTS

MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME!

“And behold - three men were standing over him!” (18:2)

There are some people who look like they are giving but they’re really taking. And there are some people who look like they are taking when they’re really giving.

Anyone who buys a \$5,000-a-plate charity dinner is giving a lot of charity, but he’s also getting a lot of status mixed in with his sushi. On the other hand, there are people who look like they’re takers but they are really giving.

Once there was a Jewish traveling salesman who found himself in a largely non-Jewish town on Friday afternoon. His business had delayed him way beyond his expectations and there was now no way he could get home for Shabbat. He had heard that there was just one Orthodox family in town where he could spend Shabbat, and as the sun was starting to set he made his way there.

The owner of the house opened the door to him and showed him into the living room. “May I stay here for Shabbat?” asked the traveling salesman. “If you like,” replied the host. “The price is \$200.” “\$200!” exclaimed the traveling salesman. “That’s more than a first-class hotel!” “Suit yourself,” replied the host.

Realizing that he had no option, the salesman reluctantly agreed. In the short time left before Shabbat the host showed the salesman his room, the kitchen and the other facilities for his Shabbat stay.

As soon as the host left the room the salesman sat down and thought to himself. “Well, if this is going to cost me \$200, I’m going to get my money’s worth.” During the entire Shabbat he availed himself unstintingly of the house’s considerable facilities. He helped himself to the delicious food in the fridge. He had a long luxurious shower before and after Shabbat. He really made himself “at home.”

When he had showered and packed, he made his way downstairs and plunked two crisp \$100 bills down on the

table in front of his host.

“What’s this?” inquired the host. “That’s the money I owe you,” replied the salesman. “You don’t owe me anything. Do you really think I would take money from a fellow Jew for the mitzvah of hospitality?” “But you told me that Shabbat here costs \$200.”

“I only told you that to be sure that you would make yourself at home.”

When a guest comes to your home, his natural feeling is one of embarrassment. No one likes being a taker. When a guest brings a present the worst thing you can say is “You shouldn’t have done that!” Rather take the bottle of wine (or whatever it is), open it up, put it in the middle of the table and say “Thank you so much.” By allowing him to contribute to the meal, you will mitigate his feeling of being a taker and you will have done the mitzvah of hospitality to a higher degree.

The mitzvah of hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. We learn this from the beginning of this week’s Torah portion. G-d had come to visit Avraham on the third day after his *brit mila* — the most painful day. G-d made the day extremely hot so that Avraham should not be bothered by guests. When G-d saw that Avraham was experiencing more pain from his inability to do the mitzvah of hospitality than the pain of the *brit mila* He sent three angels who appeared as men so that Avraham could do the mitzvah of hospitality. When these “men” appeared Avraham got up from in front of the Divine Presence to greet his guests.

Hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence.

• Sources: Rashi, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham “bargains” G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot’s daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the

birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar’s son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham’s unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

ISRAEL Forever

GREATER ERETZ YISRAEL

“To your descendants I have given the land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates; the Kennite, the Kennizite and the Kadmonite; the Hittite, the Perizzite and the Rephaim; the Emorite, the Canaanite, the Girgashite and the Jebusite.” (*Bereishet* 15:18-21)

This promise given by G-d to Avraham that we recall

in this week’s Torah portion mentions ten nations whose lands would be inherited by the descendants of Avraham. Although ten nations are here mentioned, we were given only the land of seven of them. The other three lands – Edom, Ammon and Moab – will be inherited only with the arrival of Mashiach to become part of the truly “Greater Eretz Yisrael”.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

EILONEI MAMREI – CIRCUMCISION AND REVELATION

This week’s Torah portion begins with the account of G-d’s revelation to the Patriarch Avraham in Eilonei Mamrei.

Historically identified with the city of Chevron, this was the site where Avraham fulfilled the Divine



command to circumcise himself. Since it was his friend Mamrei who encouraged Avraham to do so, this site is called by his name and was honored with the visit of the three angels delivering their Heavenly message.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

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- The promise to sell which must not be kept
- The funnel used for forbidden wine
- What is considered a contact between permitted and forbidden wine
- Drinking wine from one faucet of a large container while a non-Jew drinks from another
- The status of wine or water into which forbidden wine or water has been mixed
- The general rule of small amounts of forbidden matter affecting a larger quantity they have entered
- Selling forbidden wine which fell into a cistern of wine
- The winepress tarred by a non-Jew
- Removing forbidden material from surfaces
- *Kashering* and mikveh immersion for vessels purchased from a non-Jew
- Broiling in the Beit Hamikdash
- Sticking a knife into the earth to *kasher* it

BEIT HAMIKDASH BROILING

Was *libun* required for the vessels used in the Beit Hamikdash for broiling sacrificial flesh? *Libun* is the direct exposure to fire, which is mandatory for removing the non-kosher matter absorbed in vessels used for broiling before using them for kosher food. Although only strictly kosher meat was broiled in the Beit Hamikdash, there was, however, the problem of *notar*. Any meat left over beyond the time limit set by the Torah for consumption was strictly forbidden. The same rule applies to meat that was absorbed in its broiling vessel, which is subsequently released through the next broiling which takes place after the time limit.

The grills and spits that were used daily in the Beit

Hamikdash would thus have faced the problem of *notar*. If the flesh of a *chattat* sacrifice, whose time limit is one day and night, was broiled one day, the meat that these vessels absorbed would be released in the next day's broiling of a sacrifice and render it unfit for consumption. How then did they manage to continually use the same vessels?

One of the answers offered by the Sae Rava is that on the day they broiled *chattat* flesh they would also broil the flesh of a *shlamim* sacrifice, which may be consumed for another day as well. The absorbed *chattat* meat would thus be released into the *shlamim* meat and consumed. This process could be repeated daily so that one day's broiling would achieve *libun* for the earlier absorption without encountering the problem of *notar*.

• Avoda Zara 76a

What the SAGES Say

"When the Torah ordered the immersion of non-Jewish vessels in a mikveh it also included new ones purchased from them"

• Rabbi Nachman in the name of Rabbah bar Avuha - Avoda Zara 75b

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DA'AT TORAH

From: Mr. Anon in England

Dear Rabbi,
How would you explain the dynamics of “*da’at Torah*” to a secular audience, many of them being total beginners as far as Jewish learning is concerned? By *da’at Torah* I mean the special insight that sincere and intense Torah study imparts to the leaders of the Torah community. I’m looking forward to hearing from you as soon as possible. Many thanks in advance.

Dear Mr. Anon,

I would start with some examples that most people know and perhaps can relate to. Take Mordechai of the Megilla, for example. He appeared to do everything wrong, against the common wisdom, but was right in the end.

Shushan’s Jews, promoting politically-correctness, attended Achashverosh’s feast. (It’s not PC to refuse a king’s invitation to his victory celebration.) Mordechai, however, warned against it (spoil-sport, not cool, old-fashioned).

Later, when it was time for everyone to bow to Haman, again Mordechai “just doesn’t get it.” By his refusal to bow, he seems to be the one who brings a death decree on all the Jews.

Indeed, however, as the Talmud says, it was attending the feast, given in celebration of the non-rebuilding of Jerusalem, which brought about the decree. Listening to Mordechai could have saved a lot of trouble!

Let’s go on in the story. After Haman’s decree became known, the Jews said to themselves: “We have a sister in the palace, Esther. Queen Esther will work to annul this bad decree.” What would common wisdom say? “Let

Esther tell the king that she’s Jewish and we Jews will get favorable treatment.” But again, Mordechai seems to miss the boat, instructing Esther to remain silent about her background. What could possibly have been his motive for this bizarre move?

We all know the end of the story. Precisely because Esther did not reveal her Jewishness, the Jews gave up on her and turned their eyes toward Heaven alone, fasting and repenting. This was precisely Mordechai’s intent and is the only thing that saved the Jews.

We see that basically everything Mordechai did — although seeming to run against common sense — in the end brought good to the Jewish People. From where did Mordechai get this special insight and ability? From his sincere and total immersion in Torah study. Mordechai, as one of the outstanding Torah scholars of the generation, sat among the foremost of the Sanhedrin, Israel’s Supreme Torah court.

Another example is Moshe. When he went to Pharaoh the first time — at G-d’s command, no less — things got worse(!) for the Jews. Obviously, Moshe was imbued with supernatural insight, and the imperative to follow him was not lessened by the immediate result of his actions. Of course we all know the end of that story and that Moshe eventually succeeded in a big way.

Note that, according to the midrash, 80 percent of the Jewish People were not willing to leave fertile Egypt for the uncharted desert. Because these millions of people were not ready to follow Moshe, they were forever lost to the Jewish People.

I think these examples show fairly clearly the importance of following the guidance of our Torah leaders, and that such allegiance should not hinge on our short-term perception of the immediate result of that leadership.

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A GESTURE FOR GUESTS

Question: Our home sometimes serves as a meeting place for activists in the community. My past experience has taught me that these neighbors will be too preoccupied to partake of any refreshments which I may bring to the table. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Hospitality is much more than providing

nourishment for hungry and thirsty guests. Serving them is your way of showing a gesture of respect for their presence and is always appreciated as such. In addition, you never know when a guest may indeed be thirsty enough for a drink so that your gesture becomes literal hospitality.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

NEVER GIVE UP HOPE II

In last week's issue we wrote about the lesson those involved in outreach to alienated Jews could learn from the story of a ring lost in the sea returned after 30 years. A recent CNN documentary amplified this lesson of never giving up hope by interviewing two Polish former neo-Nazis who only recently discovered their Jewish roots.

Ola and Pawel were very involved in the skinhead neo-Nazi movement and one day Ola recalled that when she was 13 years old her mother told her about their family's Jewish ancestry. Determined to investigate further, she went to Poland's Jewish Historical Institute. There she confirmed what her mother related about her ancestors hiding their Jewish identity to escape Nazi persecution.

When she also discovered that the same was true of her skinhead husband a dramatic change came over the couple. They began attending an Orthodox synagogue and eventually fully embraced Judaism. Today Pawel is studying to work in a kosher slaughterhouse and Ola is working as kashrut supervisor in the synagogue kitchen.

Warsaw Chief Rabbi Michael Shudrich, who has served as their guide, thus sums up the story:

"It says on a personal level never write somebody off. Where they may have been ten years ago doesn't have to be where they are today."

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