

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA · 15 CHESHVAN 5774 - OCT. 19, 2013 · VOL. 21 NO. 4

PARSHA INSIGHTS

PLEASE DO NOT ADJUST YOUR SET, REALITY IS AT FAULT.

"And he (Avraham) was sitting at the entrance of the tent..." (18:1)

The elderly lady was sitting in the parking lot. She was obviously very distressed. "Mrs. Cohen," I said, "What's the matter?" She replied trembling, "I don't know where it is! I don't know where it is!" "You don't know where what is?" I asked. "I don't know where my car is! I'm sure I left it here, and it's not here now. Maybe I'm going senile. Maybe I don't know where things are anymore. Maybe I shouldn't drive anymore!"

I thought for a moment.

"Maybe your car has been stolen, Mrs. Cohen."

Her eyes widened. "Do you think so? Oh, I do hope so!"

We called the police, and sure enough her car had been found, stripped to the chassis, in a town on the West Bank.

Sometimes things aren't the way they seem.

"...and he (Avraham) was sitting at the entrance of the tent..."

The Midrash reveals to us that Avraham wanted to stand up when G-d appeared to him. G-d said to him, "You sit, and I will stand..."

When you go see your bank manager to try to get a loan, you stand and he sits. The one who stands is dependent on the one sits.

When Avraham wanted to stand, G-d told him to sit. In other words, G-d was telling Avraham, "I depend on you;

everything depends on you, not the other way around."

How can this be? How can G-d depend on any creation?

If you look at this world it seems that above us is only the sky. You would be hard pushed to see the existence of many, many worlds above this one. And yet they exist. Millions of worlds, and of all of them, ours is the lowest. And yet, G-d decided that the whole of creation would be governed by what we do in this lowest of the worlds, down here at the bottom of the pile.

When we perform an act of kindness it reverberates all the way up to the highest of the highest worlds, and that causes G-d to radiate an influx of blessing back down to this world.

In other words, a kind word may stop an earthquake, or a train collision, or a war.

This is the how we can understand the verse in Psalms, "Give strength to G-d." (96:7) Man has been given the role of strengthening the creation through his actions, or, G-d forbid, the reverse.

You'd never believe it to be so, but sometimes things are not the way they seem.

Sources: based on Da'at Torah
and a story heard from Rabbi Mordechai Moshe Epstein

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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.

TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

SHEKALIM 2 - 8

“On the first day of Adar they would announce regarding the Shekalim”

The above statement in the *mishna* opens our new *masechta*, Shekalim, and teaches that on the first of Adar messengers of Beit Din were sent to announce to the people to bring the *machzit hashekel* – to fulfill the mitzvah of bringing the “half shekel” – to the Beit Hamikdash. This money was used to purchase the public sacrifices for the “new year” that would begin one month later on the first day of Nissan.

One might ask, “Why was there no similar announcement made to remind the people regarding the bringing of the personal sacrifices they needed to bring on each Festival?” The “Alei Tamar” – an *Acharon* – explains that the personal sacrifices were different since they were eaten by the owners or brought for atonement – unlike the public sacrifices bought with the *shekalim* and burnt on the Altar. Therefore it wasn’t necessary to remind the people to bring their personal sacrifices, since they would certainly remember to bring them.

• Shekalim 2a

“The righteousness (charity) and judgment that you do is dearer to Me than the sacrifices”

G-d consoled King David with this statement, that although his son Solomon – and not he – would build the Beit Hamikdash, the activities of King David were more beloved by G-d. This statement is based on a verse in Proverbs (21:3). The commentators explain that although the sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash atoned for sins, nevertheless the judgments and righteousness of King David caused people to cease from sinning, which is certainly preferred. The Yerushalmi Talmud adds in Tractate Sanhedrin that King David would give charity out of his own pocket if the party he pronounced as guilty was poor and could not afford to pay the plaintiff. This is what is meant by the “*tzedaka*” that King David did with judgment – judgment with charity – as stated in the verse in Proverbs.

• Shekalim 7b

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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.

לעלוי נשמה
מרת אסתר בשאה בת ר' משה יחזקאל ע"ה
אשה יראת ד' ובעלת חסד
נלב"ע ר' מנחם אב תשע"ג
ת.ג.צ.ב.ה

Abarbanel ON PARSHAT VAYERA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

In this parsha, as in the preceding parsha of Lech Lecha, Sarah is abducted by the ruler of the country, first in Egypt by Pharaoh, and now in Canaan by Avimelech. Although the two episodes differ in certain respects, they both illustrate Avram and Sarah's sound moral judgment as well as providing insight into the social and ethical realities of the ancient Near East.

In Egypt, Avram realized that his wife's beauty was in stark contrast to the unattractive Egyptian women. Assuming that she was his wife, the depraved Egyptians would likely kill him in order to take her. However, by telling them that she was his sister, they would offer him gifts in exchange for her. (In reality, Sarah was actually his niece and at that time a niece was often referred to as a sister. As a brother or uncle, he had the right to accept gifts and marry her off in those days just as a father did.)

Although Avram knew that she would almost certainly be violated against her will, telling them the truth would have resulted in his death and her violation anyway. Therefore he elected to stall for time and drag out the negotiations, hoping for Divine deliverance.

In Parshat Vayera they are faced with essentially the same dilemma. He again refers to Sarah as his sister and again G-d intercedes to prevent her defilement. Avimelech, however, is on a higher moral level than Pharaoh and merits G-d's appearing to him prophetically to reveal Sarah's actual status. Pharaoh, on the other hand, was only prevented from defil-

ing her by the miraculous appearance of a debilitating venereal disease. Since the custom in the ancient Near East dictated that a defiled woman could no longer remain with her husband, Pharaoh sent them away immediately, since people assumed, albeit erroneously, that Pharaoh had defiled her. Pharaoh wanted to make sure that they would not be seen together in Egypt as husband and wife.

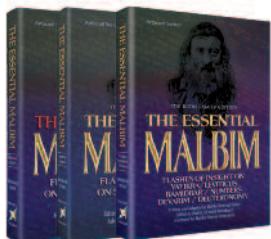
Avimelech, however, allowed them to stay in order to dramatically demonstrate that he had not defiled her. Avram himself recognized that Avimelech was morally superior to Pharaoh when he says that his main concern was not Avimelech's immorality but rather, "Surely there is no fear of G-d in this place and they will slay me because of my wife." Avram feared that the degeneracy of Sodom and Gemorrah had spread to Avimelech's subjects as well.

Finally, Avimelech gives Avram a gift of silver and says to Avram, enigmatically, "Let it be for you an eye-covering to all who are with you; and to all you will be vindicated." Avimelech was giving him advice: Use this money to purchase face-covering clothing worn by the undefiled modest women of that time. This will clearly indicate that she has been completely vindicated. Additionally, Avimelech is telling him that in order not to arouse suspicion in the eyes of everyone in the future, he should refrain from calling her his sister so that she will not be in need of miraculous intervention.

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PERSONALIZING PRAYER

From: Daniel

Dear Rabbi,

I am a bit new to prayer but I'm having trouble with what seems to be an over-emphasis on the formal liturgy in the prayer book. It doesn't seem to me that these prayers are in the Torah, and somehow, intuitively, I think G-d prefers a more personal approach to prayer. What's more, constant repetition of fixed prayers can lead to prayers of obligation by rote rather than of desire with inspiration. Can this be what G-d intended? Why are the prayers so formalized? Is there no room for personalization or individuality?

Dear Daniel,

I empathize entirely with what you're saying, and although the formal prayers are in fact based mainly on verses which are infused throughout most of the prayer book, G-d certainly did, and still does, desire personal prayers, which pour out of the individual heart with longing and inspiration.

As recorded in the Torah and Scriptures, historically, this was always the case. Adam's relationship with G-d was extremely personal and individual. He literally conversed with G-d. The same is true of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as the Matriarchs, who are all described as having direct, personal requests, discussions, and even "negotiations" with G-d. Of course, Moses literally glowed through communing with G-d in the Tent of Meeting. The prophets and righteous Kings even connected to G-d through music, dance and meditation.

So what's the source for the formalized prayers in the prayer book?

As a result of extended exile and severe persecution it was no longer guaranteed that each person would be inspired or able to regularly interact with and develop an individual relationship with G-d through personalized prayer. The Sages, whose great inspiration and vast knowledge in the venues of

connecting with G-d, therefore composed a formula for prayer that would work for all individuals in all scenarios for all times. These prayers serve as a master key which opens the gates of Heaven to all who recite them.

Even though these prayers are so powerful that they are effective with minimal intention, and even with incomplete recitation, the Sages did not intend that they replace personal, individualized prayer. Their intention was only that every person should have at least some conducive framework within which to develop his own relationship with G-d. For example, in each blessing of the "amida" (the silent, standing prayer) a person is encouraged to improvise in his own words on the theme of that blessing, relating it to his own individual needs, desires and aspirations. The same is also true for adding any expression in the more general blessing which refers to G-d as "The Listener of Prayer".

While it is true that repetition can lead to reciting the prayers by rote, a person who is proactive about his prayer will be aware of, and sensitive to, all the changes that occur to him and within him throughout each day, week, month and year. At each of these times he is a different person with differing needs, which are all addressed by, and should be reflected in, the prayers which are thereby always changing and always new.

Finally, it's also important to know that just as the Sages didn't intend the formal prayer to replace personal expression with the prayers, they didn't intend it to replace the personal venues of prayer that were practiced by our ancestors either. So while it is obligatory to pray the formal prayers (improvising with our own spiritual signature as above), ideally, each person should be regularly involved in connecting to G-d in ways and at times which are personally inspiring and meaningful to him. This can be through individual prayer, poetry, music, dance, meditation, reflection on G-d through nature etc. The growth from these personal prayer sessions and their effect on us then vitalizes and enhances our formal prayers with renewed enthusiasm and appreciation.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

RABBI YOSSI, THE TANA

"All your actions should be directed to Heaven." —
Rabbi Yossi in Avot 2:12

One should intend to be healthy and strong in order that he should have a spirit capable of knowing G-d, for it is impossible to understand wisdom if one is hungry or ill, or if one of his limbs aches. If he follows this course all his life he is constantly serving G-d, even in his business activities and



his marital relations, for his motive is always to achieve the wholesomeness required to serve G-d. If he sleeps in order to rest his mind and body and so will avoid illnesses that prevent him from serving G-d, his sleep is also considered a positive act of service.

King Solomon wisely put it: "Know Him in all your ways".

• Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deyot 3:3

by Rabbi Yitzchak Botton

THE WORLD'S FOUNDATION

The world was founded on loving-kindness. A testimony of this loving-kindness is prayer, the center pillar of the world¹. Thus, prayer lies at the heart of human existence, a crossing through which Man meets the Divine. A Divine gift, it has been imbedded into the nucleus of creation as a means for Man to plead for mercy.

Here are the words of the Ramban regarding the nature of prayer. "Prayer is an expression of G-d's kindness to listen to all who call out to Him in prayer, just as a loving king, in his great mercy, listens to the requests of his people."

But how does one begin to approach the infinite? How does one offer up praise to One who is beyond all praise? Chazal teach, "Where you find G-d's greatness, there you find His humility." Accordingly, G-d 'lowers' Himself from beyond the highest of Heavens to listen to Man's requests, then fulfills them, as it is written, "It will be that before they (Yisrael) call, I will answer, while they yet speak (in prayer) I will hear (and grant their requests, and fulfill the desire of their hearts).²

It is explained that without G-d's permission it would be forbidden to approach Him with our requests. On the surface, the idea of Man suggesting to G-d what would be best is irrational. G-d, however, in His great humility listens to the requests of Man.

To praise G-d would also be forbidden without G-d's permission, since any praise we would offer up will fall far short of representing His true greatness. G-d, however, out of His

great kindness, 'lowers' Himself to our level of praise, considering it a merit rather than an insult.

A story:

A young boy reaches into his pocket to pay for a candy bar, but he's lost his money. Donald, next in line, realizes what has happened. "Give him a few of those on me", he says pointing to the candy bars. The boy turns to Donald, overjoyed at his display of kindness, and begins to thank him. "You must have a lot of money if you can afford to pay for so many candy bars; my father says that they're very expensive so I can only get one a week if I behave. Donald smiles and hands the cashier a crisp hundred dollar bill, which further amazes the boy who never saw a bill with so many zeros on it. What the boy didn't realize is that Donald was in fact Donald Trump, and that he had walked into one of the stores located at the ground level of Trump Plaza across from the famous Manhattan Park.

1. Perkei Avot 1:2; according to many commentators the reference to "service" refers to the daily service in the Beit Hamikdash. Today, however, it is represented by prayer, which was instituted in place of the daily service after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. One can also explain that the word "service" is a direct reference to prayer, which is also called "service". See *Sifri Parshat Ekev, Ta'anit 2a*, where the Sages derive that the term "service of the heart" is a reference to prayer.

2. Isaiah 65:24; and see commentary there.

@ OHR Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students

The Only Jew in the School

Rabbi Gavriel Rubin Age: 55

Neve Yaakov, Jerusalem

Stanford University – Major: Anthropology

Beit Midrash alumnus - 1982

Rabbi Gavriel Rubin grew up in Stewart, Oklahoma and was the only Jew in his public school class and, during certain years, the only Jew in the entire school. While at Stanford University, young Rubin became very active in the local Orthodox community. "I felt I should try everything," he recalls, having grown up with no



by Daniel Keebler

Jewish community in Oklahoma.

After graduating in 1982, young Rubin came to Israel to learn in Ohr Somayach for a year and a half. He went on to learn in additional yeshivot for six years before returning to Ohr Somayach as a staff member.

Rabbi Rubin has worked in editing and translation for almost 20 years. His works include letters, lectures, life stories, and writings of leading Jewish personalities. He is currently editing a book in Hebrew on Torah and Science. Rabbi Rubin says his degree in Anthropology was perfect for both his translation work and teaching at Ohr Somayach where he made Jewish ideas digestible to students of all backgrounds.

RAV OVADIA YOSEF ל"ז

A Torah Giant in Every Sense

BY RABBI REUVEN LAUFFER

It is hard to even begin to fathom the enormity of the passing of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Rav Ovadia (as he was affectionately known throughout the Orthodox world) was ninety three years old when he passed away last week – certainly a ripe age and one that most people would regard as a long life. So why the vast outpouring of grief among all sectors of the Jewish Nation? And what was it about Rav Ovadiah's life that caused an unprecedented *eight hundred thousand* people to attend his funeral?

To put it simply, Rav Ovadia was a giant in every single dimension of Torah. He knew everything. His encyclopedic knowledge was certainly enhanced by his phenomenal memory. It is hard to even try to quantify that knowledge. He knew intimately every single one of the over ten thousand scholarly works in his library. But his real strength in understanding Torah came from his exceptional powers of concentration. He was renowned for being so engrossed in his studies that he was completely unaware of what was happening around him. Binyamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, related that on several occasions he came to discuss extremely weighty matters with Rav Ovadiah and he would wait until Rav Ovadiah became aware that he was there. Sometimes it would take a few minutes and often much longer, but the Prime Minister would not interrupt the Rav's studies because he felt that Rav Ovadiah was dealing with the past, the present and the future of the Jewish People as he learnt his precious Torah.

Rav Ovadiah was considered to be the final word in all matters of Jewish Law. Of course, being conversant with all the myriad authorities of Jewish Law over the generations meant that he was able to rule on all matters, but there was something so much deeper than "just" knowledge. Rav Ovadiah was able to relate to every single person according to who he was. He did not remain ensconced in the Ivory Tower of academia. Rather, he went out to the people. Rav Ovadiah would travel the length and breadth of the country to teach Torah to anyone and everyone and he had an uncanny ability to be able to understand immediately not just what was being asked but why it was being asked as well. His ability to rule on all matters that were brought to him (and questions flooded in each and every day from all four corners of the world!) was based not just on his unparalleled accumulation of wisdom, but also on his unpar-

alleled concern and love for the Jewish People. Just ask any one of the multitudes who received Rav Ovadiah's trademark pat on the cheek – a sign of his true affection for the person. He positively radiated warmth and love for all Jews regardless of what their spiritual levels, and that love was reciprocated in the numbers of Jews who came to bid him a final farewell.

Our Sages teach us that the passing of a righteous person leaves a gaping hole, and that we are supposed to learn a lesson from their passing from this world. How much more so when that righteous person also happened to be the spiritual leader of so many countless people! Is it possible to take just one message from the passing of Rav Ovadiah – is it possible to take just one facet from such a multi-faceted personality? Personally, I think that the simplest and perhaps the most important lesson that we can take from Rav Ovadiah's passing is the value of time. I truly believe that in a certain way Rav Ovadiah is irreplaceable, but I also truly believe that we can all learn from his time-management. We all manage to get from one end of the day to the other, but the real question is how much time do we lose on the way. Even if a person manages to "rescue" only a few minutes each day due to being touched by Rav Ovadiah's passing, then a lesson of immeasurable worth has been learnt.

With the passing of Rav Ovadiah we have lost one of the greatest scholars and role-models of the last several generations. It is not for me to measure and to judge, but I feel that Rav Ovadiah – that giant of Torah and of Fear of Heaven – is someone that cannot be replicated, which means that we have just slipped into a slightly lower level than we were in prior to his passing. This loss is very disturbing, and I believe that it carries with it enormous repercussions for us – the generation that is left orphaned from one of our greatest leaders. Rav Ovadiah could rule on anything at any time. But it wasn't just "religious" matters. He made enormous decisions in the societal spheres that were completely unhindered by anything aside from the Torah that he cherished and loved without any limits.

What will be now? I do not know. But I do know that our world will not be quite the same with Rav Ovadiah's passing.