

Parsha Q&A



Parshas Vayera

For the week ending 18 Cheshvan 5759
6 & 7 November 1998

Parsha Questions

1. Why did Hashem appear to Avraham after the *bris 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 Yishmael to prepare the food for the guests?
6. The angels asked Avraham where Sarah was. Why?
7. When Hashem related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before Hashem?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matzos*. 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 Hashem 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 Hashem listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

Sherlox Holmes And The Weaning-Party Mystery

"Dr. Watstein," said world famous detextive Sherlock Holmes, "sometimes you need to know the entire Tanach in order to understand a single word of it. That's why I'm especially delighted to invite you to the big feast I'm making tomorrow in honor of my recent completion of the study of the entire Tanach."

"Congratulations, Mr. Holmes!" said Watstein. "Speaking of big feasts, perhaps you could help me understand this difficult text: And Avraham made a great feast (*mishteh gadol*) on the day that Yitzchak was weaned." (Bereishis 21:6)

"It makes sense to me," said Sherlock.

"It's Rashi's comment that's stumped me. Rashi says that it was called a great feast because the generation's great people were there — Shem, Ever and Avimelech."

"Would Avraham, known throughout the land as 'Prince of G-d,' make a big feast without inviting these prominent people?" asked Sherlock.

"That's irrelevant!" cried Watstein. "The only relevant thing is, what does the phrase 'mishteh gadol' really mean? To me, it seems to mean a big feast, plain and simple; 'Gadol' (great) describes the feast, not the guests. Why, then, does Rashi take this word *gadol* seemingly out of context? Why does Rashi say that it describes the prominence of the guests? What's bothering Rashi?"

"You sometimes need to know the entire Tanach in order to understand a single word of it," said Sherlock.

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Answer

“Look elsewhere where the Tanach states that someone ‘made a feast’,” said Sherlox. “In every case, the verse tells for whom the feast was prepared.”

“Really?” said Watstein. “Hmm, let me think...Yitzchak ‘made a feast for them’ (Bereishis 26:30), Lot ‘made a feast for them’ (Bereishis 18:3), Pharaoh ‘made a feast for all his servants,’ (Bereishis 39:20). But is this always true? Are there other examples?”

“There are many such examples throughout Tanach,” said Sherlox. “To the best of my knowledge it is always true: Whenever it states that someone ‘made a feast’ it always tells who the guests were. Therefore, Rashi is bothered by an incongruity: Why doesn’t this verse state or imply for whom Avraham made the feast? Why is this feast different than all other feasts?”

“I see,” said Watstein. “If not for Rashi’s explanation, the verse would be out of step with dozens of similar expressions throughout Tanach; It would be missing the guest list, so to speak! Therefore, by explaining that ‘great’ refers not to the feast but rather to the guests, Rashi addresses this difficulty: Avraham made a feast for the greats.”

“Dr. Watstein, you’re headed for greatness.”

(Source: *Maskil L’David*; *Sherlox*” is by Reuven Subar, inspired by Dr. Avigdor Bonchek’s “What’s Bothering Rashi”)

I Did Not Know That!

Because Avraham invited the angels to “sit under the tree” (Bereishis 18:4) his offspring were rewarded with the mitzvah of succah.

Midrash Tanchuma

Recommended Reading List

Ramban

18:7	The Love of Kindness
18:13	For the Sake of Peace
18:15	Sarah’s Laughter
19:8	Lot’s Disgrace
22:1	The Meaning of a Trial
22:16	The Promise of Eternity

Sforno

18:2	The Love of Kindness
18:22	Persistence
19:8	Lot’s Reasoning
19:11	The Nature of the Wicked
19:37-8	Meaning Well

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 Hashem came to ‘visit’ him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce that Sarah would give birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were Arabians 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 *mitzvos*.
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 put to death because she gave food to a poor man.
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 - Since they too really should have been 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.