

# Kindert Torah

Parashas Vayera

## Silver on Glass

Sdom was a city of great wealth. The land owned by its people was very fertile, producing an abundance of crops. The earth of Sdom was rich in another way. A Sdomite would pick vegetables from his garden, and find a mother lode of gold buried in the ground. With such abundant resources, the Sdomites became very wealthy indeed. However, there was a dark side to this rich place.

"The outcry of Sdom and Amorrhah has become great, and their sin is very grave" (Bereshis 18:20). What was their sin? Sdom was a place of unspeakable crime and cruelty. The residents despised acts of kindness. They considered anyone who tried to help his fellow man a criminal, and punished him accordingly. Guests to the city were tortured. Visiting merchants were robbed of their wares. If they complained, they were fined. Such was the perversion of "justice" in Sdom.

Why were such wealthy people unwilling to help others by sharing some of their prosperity? Perhaps this story about Rebbe Yaakov answers the question. Rebbe Yaakov was a poor man who excelled in the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* (accommodating guests). His income was meager, and his house was tiny. However, weary travelers and poor people always found a home there. Rebbe Yaakov warmly welcomed them, personally giving them a good meal and a bed.

One day his Rav, the tsaddik Rebbe Yishayahu came to visit Rebbe Yaakov. Rebbe Yishayahu was so impressed with the *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) of his pupil for the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, that he gave him a blessing that he would become a wealthy man in order to increase his performance of this mitzvah. The tsaddik's blessing was fulfilled, and Rebbe Yaakov became a very wealthy man. He bought a huge home and filled it with beautiful furnishings. His servants took care of the home leaving him free to attend to his business matters. He no longer had time to learn Torah, pray properly, or personally attend to his guests. The employees served them, without the warmth of Rebbe Yaakov. They quickly grew tired of the cold treatment and stopped coming.

One day the tsaddik Rebbe Yishayahu came again to visit Rebbe Yaakov. The guard refused him entry into the home until he sent a message revealing his identity. Rebbe Yaakov came out to personally welcome Rebbe Yishayahu and invite him into his new home. Rebbe Yishayahu looked around and was very disturbed by what he saw - beautiful furnishings, but not even one guest! He motioned to Rebbe Yaakov to come over to the window.

"What do you see?"  
"Passers by, Rebbe."  
"Now, come over to this mirror. What do you see?"  
"Myself."  
"Rebbe Yaakov, please explain the difference between the mirror and the window. Both are made of glass, yet you can see other people through the window, but in the mirror you only see yourself."  
"The difference is very simple, Rebbe. The glass is clear. However, the mirror is a piece of glass coated with silver. The silver prevents you from seeing others."  
"That is very interesting. Silver (money) prevents you from seeing anyone but yourself. It is worthwhile to rid yourself of this excess wealth, so that you can again begin to see other people."

Rebbe Yaakov understood the tsaddik's message. He felt terrible regret over his mistake, and asked the Rebbe if there was a way that he could do teshuva. Rebbe Yishaya replied that he should return to his old way of personally caring for guests. If he did this with the same warmth, then he would retain his fortune of wealth. If not, he would lose it. And so, Rebbe Yaakov remained a rich man, with a home full of guests. In the center of the guest room was a mirror with half of the silver coating removed. This served as a constant reminder of the words of the tsaddik.



*Kinderlach . . .  
Wealth is a big test. Money draws a person's attention. One who has a lot of money can get caught up in only thinking about the money and his plans to spend or invest it. He may not see other people at all. Worse, he may see them as obstacles in his way. He then feels justified in doing anything to remove them. Kinderlach, don't get caught behind the mirror. Keep your vision clear. Remember that money is a means to serve Hashem. As we learned last week, chessed is the backbone of Avodas Hashem. Use your wealth to do chessed. Serve people silver on a glass platter.*

## The Ultimate Test

Akeidas Yitzchak - the binding of Yitzchak - was Avraham Avinu's last and most difficult test. Yitzchak was "his son, his only one, whom he loved," born to him

at age 100 after a lifetime of childlessness. The thought of sacrificing such a precious child is beyond comprehension. This crushing test would break an ordinary person. Yet there is another aspect to Akeidas Yitzchak that is far more difficult.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian points out that Avraham Avinu had tremendous *seichel* (common sense). After all, he concluded on his own that there is a Creator of the universe. He then deduced how to serve Him with such certainty that allowed himself to be thrown into a fiery furnace to sanctify His Name. Hashem saved him. Avraham Avinu's message to the world was *chessed* - we must be kind to each other. He treated other people royally, teaching them by example that this was the way to serve The Creator. Human sacrifice was one of the barbaric ways to serve pagan idols. Nothing could be farther removed from Avraham's teachings. If he went through with this test and slaughtered Yitzchak, his whole life's work would be ruined. People would no longer listen to such a man who contradicted himself so radically.

Avraham Avinu could have had his own doubts also. After all, this command went completely against his *seichel*. Could it really be the Will of Hashem? Was he mistaken in his previous path, in which he concluded that the foundation of the Torah is *chessed*? In this final test, we see the true greatness of Avraham Avinu. He was the supreme servant of Hashem, prepared to carry out His Will no matter what. Even if it meant losing his son, his life's work, and his way of thinking. That was our forefather Avraham - the ultimate *Eved* (servant of) Hashem.

*Kinderlach . . .  
You come from good stock. Your ancestor was Avraham Avinu. We know about his wonderful acts of chessed, and his kiruv rechokim (bringing people close to Hashem). We also know of his willingness to give up his life for Hashem. Now we see another aspect of Avraham Avinu's greatness - his absolute bitachon (trust) in the Almighty. He was prepared to do whatever Hashem said, even if it contradicted his entire life. What an inspiration for us! Sometimes it is difficult for us to carry out Hashem's will. We need only to recall Avraham Avinu. Our ancestor withstood the ultimate test. He gave us strength. We can do it too.*

### Parasha Questions

- Why did Avraham call the name of the place, "Hashem yireh"? (22:14 and Rashi).
- When was the ram prepared to be sacrificed in place of Yitzchak? (Rashi 22:13)
- Why did the angel repeat Avraham's name twice? (Rashi 22:11)
- Why did Hashem not reveal Avraham's destination at first? (Rashi 22:2)

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