

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA · 15 CHESHVAN 5768 · OCT. 27, 2007 · VOL. 15 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 and 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. G-d was telling Avraham, I depend on you; everything

depends on you, not the other way round.

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 pressed 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 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 Tehillim (Psalms) “Give strength to G-d.” Man has been given the role of strengthening the creation through his actions, or, G-d forbid, the reverse.

You’d never believe it were so, but sometimes things are not the way they seem.

• *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.

ISRAEL Forever

THE EISHEL APPROACH

In an era when so many efforts are being made in Eretz Yisrael and throughout the world to bring Jews back to their religious roots, it is heartening and enlightening to read in this week’s Torah portion about the efforts of the pioneer of outreach, our forefather Avraham.

“He planted an *eishel* in Beersheba,” the Torah tells us about Avraham, “and called out in the Name of G-d.” (*Bereishet* 21:33)

Whether this *eishel* was a well-stocked place of lodging for wayfarers or an orchard to supply them with fruit, the purpose was the same — to influence people to rec-

ognize and serve the Creator. When his guests began thanking him for his hospitality he told them to direct their thanks and blessing to the Creator who was the true source of everything they received.

There are many good people in Israel following in the footsteps of Avraham. They may not have the opportunity of the *eishel*-style outreach of their forefather but they also achieve their goal by showing estranged Jews that they sincerely care for them. More and more Jews are thus beginning to “call out in the Name of G-d” and guaranteeing the security of Israel forever.

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LOVE of the LAND

VOLUME ONE - THE GLADSTONE EDITION

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.

לע"נ

מרת יוטא רחל בת ר' יעקב יהודה ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- The right of an *arusah* engaged to a *kohen* to eat *terumah* and why this was later abolished
- The wife's right to support and her obligation to work
- Transferring ownership or sanctifying something which is not yet in existence
- Which services a wife is obligated to render to her husband
- Nursing a baby and the *kashrut* status of mother's milk
- When a divorced or widowed nursing mother may remarry
- Things which may adversely affect unborn children
- Additional separations required between a husband and his *nidah* wife
- Consideration for a waiter
- Guidelines for frequency of marital relations
- The long absent Sages and the story of Rabbi Akiva
- The rebellious wife and how she is penalized

A TALE OF TWO SIGHS

“Sigh with the breaking of the loins and with bitterness sigh before their eyes.” (*Yechezkel* 20:11) This was the prophecy received by the Prophet *Yechezkel* in regard to the sad tidings concerning the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

From this description of the impact of a sigh, the Sage *Rav* derives his observation that a sigh breaks half the body (till the loins).

His statement is, however, challenged by the description in the very next passage of the response that G-d ordered the prophet to give to those who will ask him for the reason of his signing:

“For the report when it comes when every heart shall melt and all hands will be weak, every spirit will be faint and all knees shall become watery.”

Although this passage indicates that a sigh shatters the entire body, *Rav* explains that this refers to the extraordinary sigh bemoaning the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

Tosafot points out that although both of these passages refer to that tragedy the first one relates to the sigh of the prophet upon hearing that there will be destruction and such a sigh is comparable to normal human sighs which only break half the body. The second passage relates to the sigh that will be heaved when it is learned that the tragedy occurred and it will shatter the entire body.

• *Ketubot* 62a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Let her come forward – all that I have achieved and all that you have achieved is due to her.”

• *Rabbi Akiva* to his 24,000 disciples regarding his wife, upon his return home after a 24-year absence while learning and teaching - *Ketubot* 63a

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WHY GET MARRIED?

From: Anonymous

Dear Rabbi,

Why should a person get married?

Dear Anonymous,

I'll first explain some ideas behind the Jewish notion of marriage and why it's essential, and then refute some common arguments against getting married.

One of the main reasons for getting married is to help each other grow through a life-long process of emotional, intellectual and spiritual sharing and challenge. This is the meaning of the verse, "It is not good, this state of man being alone; I will make a helpmate opposite to him" (Gen. 2:18). As long as a person is single, it is not good, meaning not only is the person incomplete, but the entire Creation is also lacking perfection (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch). The purpose of this union is that each should help the other reach perfection. Sometimes this is achieved by sharing; sometimes by opposing, questioning and challenging. This ideal dynamic of "opposing-helpmate" is best achieved between a man and woman committed to a love for growth together for life.

Marriage as context for growth is also intimated by the verse, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). As father or mother, a person's main responsibility is to ensure that the child grow to be the best person possible. Marriage, then, takes a person to the next, natural and higher plane of potential perfection. Becoming one flesh is an allusion to this fusion of two perfect halves into a unified whole. In fact, the Zohar (Lech Lecha 91b) teaches that every soul is divided into male and female components before being sent into the world. Ideally, every match is the re-fusion of the halves into one.

But this becoming one flesh is not only figurative. Contrary to popular misconception, Eve was not necessarily created from Adam's rib. According to a statement of our Sages Adam was split in two. The Talmud (Eruvin 11) explains the verse 'And G-d took one of his sides' to mean that Adam was originally a composite of both male and female aspects side by side. G-d separated them in order to create the longing for, and fulfillment in, the male/female union. Therefore, marriage is the venue through which one attains spiritual, emotional and physical unity and perfection.

Of course, the true pinnacle of male/female physical unity comes to fruition in the birth of their children,

another reason to marry. Thus, G-d simultaneously commands and confers blessing upon the union of man and woman, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). However, the point is not just to have children. Being fruitful means realizing one's potential through sharing and challenge in marriage, in order that one's productive traits and talents ripen, and his branches become laden with sweet and pleasant fruits. Only then can one truly multiply, as his perfection through marriage is conferred to and perpetuated by their children, the fruits of their labor. In this way, a married couple's figurative unity as one flesh becomes manifested literally in one flesh, many times over.

Some people object to getting married because, they argue, as the divorce rate gets higher and higher, why marry to get divorced? In truth, if people really knew themselves and truly understood the purpose of marriage in short; if each person strove to become as perfect a half as possible before tying the knot, marriage would strengthen the knot, not undo it. Some consider marriage restrictive. Is permissive truly desirable? In any case, one who desires only to receive might find marriage restrictive; one who desires to give will find marriage limitless. Others claim marriage limits one's horizons experientially, career-wise, etc. However, the commitment and obligation to spouse and children provide an opportunity to attain true greatness precisely because of the need to succeed as both a person and professional.

Finally, some resist marriage for global considerations to alleviate mother earth's over-burdened resources or to reduce world hunger and the like. While these are noble concerns, they don't preclude family life. First, a lot can be done to improve personal and global consumption besides being barren. Consume less and have children while living a modest lifestyle could permit having children without adding significant demand on resources. In addition, there is really no direct correlation between one person's ability to feed his children and another person's not. Give more of your income to hungry children while feeding your own. Last, a Jew in particular should avoid this solution of celibacy or sterility. Relatively speaking, the Jews are but a tiny fraction of the world population. If anyone should undergo population control, nations who have historically persecuted, decimated and annihilated the Jews, but are themselves among the most populous, should perhaps take precedent. A Jew's self-imposed sterility abrogates the Divine command/blessing to be fruitful and multiply, making him a willing accomplice to those who have sought, and still seek, our extermination. "*Am Yisrael Chai!*"

THE CHAIR OF ELIYAHU

Question: I noticed at the Brit Milah I recently attended that a special chair is placed alongside the one on which the *sandak* sits holding the baby. Is this the right thing to do and why?

Answer: In this week's Torah portion we learn of the appearance of G-d to our Forefather Avraham in connection with his undergoing Brit Milah. In his commentary Rabbi Ovadia Seforno suggests that since this was a covenant between G-d and Avraham, the Divine partner to this covenant was actually present at the circumcision. And since this covenant is renewed at every circumcision, he concludes, a chair is placed as if to welcome the Divine Presence.

Although this would suffice as a reason for placing an empty chair, the more widely accepted reason for this custom is based on a Midrash. When the Prophet Eliyahu spoke critically of the Jewish People whom he accused of abandoning G-d, he was ordered by G-d to attend every Brit Milah and to report it as a proof of Jewish loyalty to their G-d. This is why we call that empty chair upon which we place the child at the beginning of the ritual "Eliyahu's Chair".

Although many Jews in our own time are deserving of Eliyahu's ancient criticism, the fact that they still arrange a Brit Milah for their sons allows Eliyahu to bring to Heaven a favorable report.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

GRANDPA'S TUNE

It was a story typical of the spiritual degeneration of the generations. The son of religious parents went astray and his own son was totally estranged from Judaism.

But the boy paid a regular brief visit to his grandfather every Shabbat eve and listened as he sang the songs traditionally sung before kiddush. Although he had no idea of what the words meant he was captivated by the melody.

Time passed and the boy got married, fortunately to a Jewish girl. His grandfather's song pursued him and he decided to trace its source. Together with his wife he entered a Jewish bookstore and asked the clerk if he had a clue as to which words accompanied the melody he sang for him. It took a couple of renditions until the clerk happily exclaimed:

"This is the tune to which many Jews traditionally sing the words of '*Eshet Chail*' – Woman of Valor' before their Shabbat eve meal."

He then proceeded to provide the couple with a *zemirot* booklet that contained an English translation of this chapter of *Mishlei* (Proverbs). As the young wife read the beautifully poetic tribute to the *Eshet Chail* her eyes lit up and she turned to her husband with these words:

"If this is what Judaism thinks of the woman I want to live a religious lifestyle!"

The happy ending of the story is that the couple did indeed become observant Jews — all because of Grandpa's tune.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

AVNIT – THE TEN SONS OF THE SIYUM

When a tractate of the Talmud is completed the names of the ten sons of the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Papa are mentioned in the passages recited in the Siyum ceremony.



Avnit, about a kilometer north of Zefat, is reputed to be the burial place of these Torah scholars and according to some traditions that of their great father as well.