

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA · 15 CHESHVAN 5775 - NOV. 8, 2014 · VOL. 22 NO. 4

PARSHA INSIGHTS

A GENIUS AT HIDING HIS GENIUS

“Avraham returned to his young men; they rose up and went together to Be’er Sheva.” (22:19)

Humility is the only virtue that can be possessed only subconsciously. Once a person is aware of his humility, it turns immediately into the worst kind of conceit.

The mark of the truly great is how totally unaware of how great they are.

In the town of Radin, there was a fellow in his fifties who never quite managed to get married. Yom Kippur was a very lonely time for him. In Europe, the Kol Nidrei service would finish well before nine o’clock and people would return to their homes. On Shabbat and Yom Tov he had no lack of meal invitations, but on Kol Nidrei evening there was no meal to which he could be invited. For this poor fellow it was the loneliest night of the year.

One year on Kol Nidre evening he was sitting in the shul long after everyone had gone home. He leaned forward, his forehead on his arm, and started to gently weep. After a few moments, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked up and found himself looking into the eyes of the Chafetz Chaim. The Chafetz Chaim asked him if he could sit down. He said yes. The Chafetz Chaim proceeded to talk to this fellow about every subject under the sun: his family, the weather — anything to lighten this fellow’s spirits. No subject seemed too trivial for the Chafetz Chaim to speak about.

They spoke for a very long time indeed. In fact they spoke the whole night long. About this. About that. The entire night.

It was clear to the Chafetz Chaim that his *avoda* (Divine service) this Yom Kippur was not to be immersed in prayer and *teshuvah*, but to shoot the breeze with a simple fellow who was in need of warmth and friendship.

The truly great never make other people feel that they are less — because they honestly believe about themselves that they are no more than the others.

Rabbi Dov Schwartzman, *zatzal*, who passed away but a few years ago, was one of the greatest geniuses of his gen-

eration. Rabbi Moshe Shapiro eulogized him at his funeral, saying that there was no one who was ever like “Reb Dov”, nor would there be anyone again.

And yet for all his greatness, he never let anyone feel less than him. I had the privilege to be close to him, and even though he was so far above me I never felt for a second that he looked down on me. Quite the opposite! He made me and everyone he met feel they were his equals. As Rabbi Shapiro said, he was a genius at hiding his genius.

In this week’s Torah portion, it says that Avraham “went together with his young men.” In a previous usage of this term, Rashi tells us that Avraham and Yitzchak “went together,” meaning that when Yitzchak realized that he was to be the sacrifice, they nevertheless went as of one mind — Yitzchak as willingly as Avraham.

“Avraham returned to his young men; they rose up and went together to Be’er Sheva.”

Given that these “young men” were the lowly Yishmael and Eliezer, how can we understand that they went of one mind? Did they too reach the sublime level of Avraham and Yitzchak on the way to the Akeida?

When Avraham and Yitzchak returned, they had succeeded in the greatest challenge and accomplished the most exalted mission; nevertheless, Yishmael and Eliezer had not an inkling of the lofty levels that had achieved.

Most people after such an experience would return very full of themselves and unable to relate to the ordinary and the mundane. Such was the greatness of Avraham and Yitzchak that they concealed it, to the extent that they all went “together” — Yishmael and Eliezer felt no different to them.

True greatness conceals itself.

- Sources: Based on Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch as heard from Rabbi Shmuel Nosson Conick, and a story heard about the Chafetz Chaim from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

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

YEVAMOT 37-43

The Sage said, “The hunger of a person who has bread in his basket is not comparable (i.e. is less) to that of a person who does not have bread in his basket.”

These words of wisdom are taught in our *gemara* to explain that a person is affected for the better, both psychologically and even physiologically, if he has a “security net” of knowing he can access at any time that which he needs. This is a metaphor, and is true not only regarding being less hungry if he already possesses food, but reflects on varied aspects of human nature. A person is less anxious and concerned about satisfying his needs if he knows he already possesses that which he wants and needs. Although the Sage who taught this is not named in our *sugya*, it is recorded to be either Rabbi Ami or Rabbi Asi in Tractate Yoma 74b.

• *Yevamot 37b*

Rabbi Abahu answered rhetorically, “If Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi did not teach a clear conclusion, from where would Rabbi Chiya know it?”

The question posed to him on our *daf* (as one of a series of similar questions) is as follows: “What is the rule for determining the halacha if we find a *stam beraita* teaching only one ruling, while we find an argument in this same matter in a *mishna*? One might think that the clarity expressed in the sole opinion taught in the *beraita* would give it greater weight than the lack of a clear ruling in the *mishna* — and therefore we should rule like the opinion in the *beraita*. This line of reasoning is similar to what the preceding statement in our *gemara* taught: “If there is a *stam mishna* and an argument in a *beraita*, the halacha is like the opinion in the *stam mishna*.”

However, Rabbi Abahu answers that this is not necessarily so when there is a *stam beraita* and an argument in the *mishna*. This is a different story. His reasoning is that we should assume that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was more knowledgeable than his student, Rabbi Chiya. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi taught the *mishna* and Rabbi Chiya taught the *beraita*. Therefore, if Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi did not have a clear-cut reason to rule like one side when teaching the *mishna* in a particular case, we cannot assume that Rabbi Chiya had additional information to convince us to accept his ruling in the *beraita*. Therefore, we cannot say that the halacha should follow the one specific opinion the *beraita* teaches. (Rashi, Maharik)

• *Yevamot 43 a-b*

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)?

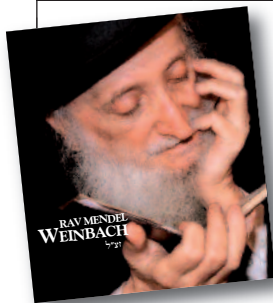
PARSHA Q&A!

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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Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT VAYERA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

The end of Parshat Vayera chronicles one of the most profound and difficult chapters in Jewish history, the Akeida (Binding of Yitzchak), Avraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Yitzchak.

Abarbanel's explanation of the Akeida is based on the principle that at no time did G-d intend that Avraham should actually slaughter his son. Rather, in order for the Jewish nation to be rooted as a unique nation dedicated to serving G-d, Avraham, as the founder of that nation had to demonstrate the ability of man's unique "super-intellect" to conquer the seemingly logical demands and passions of man's physical existence. The nature of man's relationship with G-d depends on the role of this unique intellect in his life. Avraham's willingness to sacrifice a physical body in service to G-d demonstrated that he had overcome the demands of physical existence. Only then would his progeny, the future Jewish nation, deserve to be subject to G-d's unique Divine Providence. Thus, the reason for G-d's command was not to "enlighten G-d", elevate Avraham, serve as a test for Yitzchak or serve as an example to other nations — but rather for the good of the entire Jewish nation that would eventually emerge.

The Hebrew word "*nisa*" ("testing") also means "banner" and "lifting up". Through his willingness to sacrifice his son, Avraham became, as it were, a lofty banner announcing the ultimate dedication to serving G-d. Even though the event was not witnessed publicly, the testimony of the Torah should be understood as a declaration of the ultimate service of G-d, worthy of universal reverence, awe and admiration.

Even though G-d at no time intended for Avraham to kill Yitzchak, but rather only to demonstrate his willingness to do so, it is clear that Avraham intended to go through with the sacrifice. He carefully concealed his preparations and did them himself in order to demonstrate his zeal to fulfill what he perceived as G-d's command, and to avoid undue attention which

might dissuade or delay him from accomplishing his goal.

Abarbanel makes it clear that even when he was bound upon the altar Yitzchak had no idea that his father intended to sacrifice him. Yitzchak believed that he was to be a "virtual sacrifice" to serve as a symbol and example for his own future progeny. Yitzchak only recognized Avraham's true intention when he stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay him. At this point Yitzchak is helpless and unable to escape. This is what is referred to in one of penitential prayers that we recite on every fast day when we refer to a list of events where G-d has answered our forefathers throughout history. We say there that "G-d answered Yitzchak on the altar". This is a clear reference to Yitzchak's imploring G-d to save his life.

Even though G-d at no time intended that Avraham actually slaughter his son, he did intend that Avraham think that was the case. Even though it never happened, G-d considered it as if it had, since Avraham fully intended to do so. A careful reading of the Hebrew text at the beginning of the narrative indicates that G-d spoke in an ambiguous manner, directing Avraham to bring Yitzchak to the top of the mountain in the same way that offerings are normally placed on the altar. It does not explicitly say that he was to sacrifice Yitzchak. This is, however, how Avraham interpreted the command.

In summary, carrying out the will of G-d takes precedence over all else. Avraham's actions teach us that no matter how horrifying, irrational or puzzling are G-d's commands, we cannot question G-d's motives. Our fear of G-d must be so strong that it would be inconceivable not to do His bidding. After demonstrating his willingness to carry out G-d's command one might think that G-d would have bestowed on Avraham additional blessings besides those already promised. In fact, it was the Akeida which was the final prerequisite to allow those blessings to be fulfilled.

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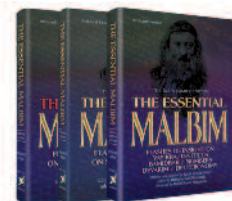
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ACCURACY OF ORAL TORAH

From: Joel

Dear Rabbi,

Since so many years elapsed between G-d's giving the Torah at Sinai and when the Oral Torah was written down, how do we know that the Talmud is an accurate account of what G-d originally taught Moshe?

Dear Joel,

You are right that a lot of time elapsed between Sinai (c. 1300 BCE) and the writing of the Mishna (c. 200 CE) – approximately 1500 years!

Some make the argument that if in a simple game of “telephone line” where whispering a message through a group of people one-by-one eventually distorts the initial message despite its being relatively short and via only a few people, the transmission of the voluminous Oral Torah through so many people over so many years certainly distorted its accuracy.

In truth, this argument is flawed for numerous reasons. One: in the game, transmitting the message is a game. However, the Divinely-ordained mandate to transmit the Torah was no joke! Two: in the game, the message is whispered, and usually obscured by subdued laughter. As anyone who’s been in a Beit Midrash for Torah study knows, it’s hardly learned in incoherent whispers! Three: in each relay of the game, the message is intentionally kept secret from everyone else. In the transmission of the Torah, it was intentionally disseminated among as many people as possible!

But what’s more, let’s consider who the people responsible for transmitting the Oral in each generation were. These were very intelligent, far-sighted rabbis who valued the Torah more than anything else in the world. For them it was the single life-line between

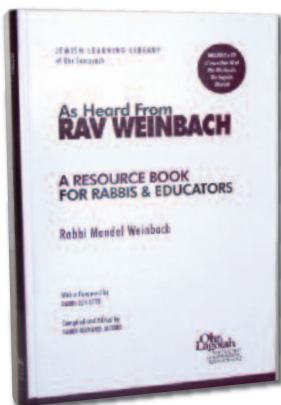
the Jewish People and G-d.

Such people certainly wouldn’t have waited 1500 years to commit to writing what they noticed was becoming eroded, distorted or forgotten. Any average person would take precautions to preserve even something that’s only moderately important. All the more so these wise and farseeing Sages would have written down something as precious to them as the Torah long before its integrity would have become compromised.

And that’s exactly what they did! The Oral Torah was recorded in writing not because it had been forgotten by that time, but out of the concern that, because of exile and persecution, it might be forgotten some time in the future. Therefore, as a precautionary measure in order to preclude the possibility of inaccuracy, the Talmudic sages, under the leadership of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, codified the Oral Torah in the form of the Mishna.

And as further proof that this writing down of the Oral Torah was not because of its having been forgotten: If that were the case, they would have written down as much as possible of what remained at that time. Yet we find the exact opposite! The Mishna is merely a skeletal collection of pithy, terse teachings whose wording is so economical that it takes pages upon pages of Gemara to clarify the dense meaning compacted into only one short Mishna. People who were recording this vast amount of oral knowledge because of its having been significantly eroded would never have written the Mishna as they did. Rather, the intention was just to provide an overall, authoritative structure within which this voluminous amount of material could continue to be discussed orally by memory.

The same dynamic applies to the Gemara, written several centuries after the Mishna. The Sages did not wait until the remaining Oral Torah had been significantly distorted or forgotten before writing it down. Rather, on the contrary, they wrote it down at a time when they still considered it to be accurate, in order to preserve that accuracy throughout the generations of exile to come.



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THE SHEMONEH ESREI: THE FIFTH BLESSING - PART 3

“Return us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us close, our King, to serving You, and help us return in perfect repentance before You.”

Garments of the Soul

Since man is made up of both body and soul, both are invested in his activities. As such, when a person expresses himself using any or all of his three faculties - thought, speech, and action - the soul and body are greatly affected. It is for this reason that one's thoughts, speech, and actions are called “garments of the soul.” When a person sins he blemishes both his body and soul. However, when he involves himself in Torah and *mitzvot* he and his soul become pure and holy.

In the blessing above there are three things mentioned: Torah, service, and repentance. They correspond to man's faculties. Torah corresponding to speech, service to action, and repentance to thought. Thus, through Torah learning, Divine service, and repentance one sanctifies his thoughts, speech, and actions. In fact, the Torah one learns in this world will become his crown in the World-to-Come; and through the actions performed in the service of G-d he builds his future reward. Most of all, a person can attain his portion in the World-to-Come through even a single moment of whole-hearted repentance. In fact, through sincere repentance one becomes closest to G-d. It is for this

reason that only regarding repentance is the term “before You” mentioned. (*Dover Shalom*)

Not Totally Forgotten

Implied in a request to return to G-d's Torah is that we have already been united together with the Torah before. When was this? The Sages say that each person is taught the entire Torah before he is born while in his mother's womb. Since one's learning then is not hindered by the evil inclination, or by any of the distractions experienced once in this world, he is able to gain exceptional clarity. Although one forgets all that he learned after being touched on the upper lip by an angel, through diligent Torah study one's learning will be returned to him. Accordingly, we ask that G-d return us to the Torah that was ours before. (*Iyun Tefilla*)

Divine Assistance

One may ask, according to the Sages, all is in the hands of G-d except for the fear of G-d. How then can we ask for G-d to help us return to His Torah and service?

Despite man's freedom to choose to heed the word of G-d or not, G-d does not remove Himself completely from the picture. Rather, He stands by, illuminating a person from above, thus helping him to be strong in his Divine service. (*Leshem Shevo Ve'achlama*)

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

TOMBS OF THE SANHEDRIN

In the northern part of Jerusalem are the Sanhedria and Sanhedria Murchevet neighborhoods. Their names are derived from their proximity to what is known as the “Tombs of the Sanhedrin”.



Tradition has it that this was the burial place for the members of the Great Sanhedrin, Jewry's highest court of law and the ultimate religious, judicial and political authority in the Land of Israel.

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