

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA · 18 CHESHVAN 5776 - OCT. 31, 2015 · VOL. 23 NO. 4

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### A LAMINATED SEASON TICKET

*“...and he (Avraham) was sitting at the entrance of the tent...” (18:1)*

I know someone who loves to have guests for Shabbat. When his guests first arrive he says, “Please help yourselves to anything on the table except the silverware.”

When the oversize cholent arrives at the table, he says, “Okay. The doors have been locked — no one can leave until the cholent is finished.”

And when they leave his house he says to them, “Okay, anyone who comes to us for Shabbat once gets a permanent season ticket. It’s Shabbat so we can’t laminate it, but don’t forget — you’ve got a season ticket. Come back again!”

*“...and he (Avraham) was sitting at the entrance of the tent...”*

Rashi comments, “to see if anyone was passing by or

returning, so he could bring them into his house.”

What does Rashi mean, “to see if anyone was passing by or returning?” Why didn’t he just say, “to see if anyone was passing by?”

A person doesn’t like to feel beholden to others.

Human nature prefers to give rather than to take. Avraham would sit at the entrance to his tent not just to bring in first-time visitors, but also to make sure that those who had already been his guests and might feel they were imposing by making a return visit, were made to feel that they had a “season ticket.”

• Source: based on Pardes Yosef

*With great sorrow the Ohr Somayach family  
shares in mourning the passing of our dear alumnus*

**RAV CHAIM YECHIEL ROTHMAN** ר'צ"י

who was critically injured a year ago in the Har Nof shul terrorist attack.

The levaya was on Motzei Shabbat Lech Lecha. May Hashem comfort his family along with all mourners of Tzion and Yerushalayim, and may we all be able to share only good news together in the future.

*Please recite tehillim and a special prayer to G-d for the safety  
and security of Klal Yisrael in these difficult times.*

## SOTA 9 - 15

“...because whoever puts his eyes (i.e. covets) that which is not fit for him (i.e. currently forbidden to him) will not receive what he wants and will lose what he has...”

This teaching is part of a *beraita* which gives this reason as the “double punishment” that a guilty Sotah receives, and also the rule that explains the double punishment of the snake in Eden (see Rashi for details). From the cases listed in the *beraita* as examples of this principle, it is clear that “putting one’s eyes to covet” means to do more than merely see something and desire it in one’s heart. It means that a person who *acts* on that desire to try to obtain the object of the desire, not only will not gain it, but will even suffer a substantial loss as a result of the act of the immoral action.

• Sotah 9a

“He (Avraham) planted an ‘eshel’ in Be’ersheva...” (Ber. 21:33). Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemia disagreed about the meaning of ‘eshel’. One said it means an orchard and the other said it means an inn.”

The *gemara* explains how the Hebrew word “*vayita*” — which normally means “planted” and would fit well with the opinion that he planted an orchard — is also found in Tanach to refer to “planting” or “building” a structure.

Avraham Avinu, the “pillar of *chesed*” (loving-kindness) of our Patriarchs, constructed an inn for travellers according to one opinion of our Sages. Rashi explains that the word “*eshel*” is an acronym for “*achila, shtiya, leviya*” meaning that he would feed the needy travellers, quench their thirst, and accompany them on the road to continue their travels after being graciously hosted at his inn.

Another explanation for “*eshel*” is that it is an acronym for “*achila, shtiya, lina*”, meaning “food, drink, and a place to stay”. A story is told regarding this interpretation. A wealthy man was well known as a great “*ba’al chesed*” who always opened his home to feed the needy. One day, however, his house burned down. The many people who knew of his great generosity were shocked and asked the Gaon from Vilna for an explanation. He told them, “This wealthy man indeed provided food and drink for the needy but he refused to provide shelter for them. Therefore the ‘*eshel*’ he provided was incomplete. He fulfilled ‘*achila*’ and ‘*shtiya*’ but not ‘*lina*’. ‘*Eshel*’ requires all three. Without the third component of ‘*lina*’ — shelter — he actually made an ‘*aish*’ (letters *aleph* and *shin*), which means that he built and planted a fire that would be a punishment to him.”

A great Rabbi in Jerusalem once explained to me why this that this seemingly gracious host was deserving of such a harsh punishment. The host greatly raised the hopes of the needy by providing plenty of nourishment, but just when they began to feel good and safe, he dashed their hopes of wellbeing by refusing them a secure place to sleep in the shelter of his home. These homeless ones were even more devastated than they had been originally, due to him.”

• Sotah 10a

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Rav Bulman *zt”l*  
on the  
Torah Portion of the Week

## 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

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## ON THE PARSHA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

### Vayera

The beginning of this Parsha describes Avraham's interaction with three men who are referred to as 'Malachim', a word that is commonly translated as 'angels', or messengers of G-d, who are sent to perform a particular task.

It is difficult to describe this encounter in terms of a normal prophetic experience during which the prophet is either asleep or in some other semi-conscious state. Here, Avraham was clearly fully awake. They also end up interacting with Lot in Sodom and it is clear that Lot was not a prophet like Avraham.

In order to explain this unusual interaction, Abarbanel notes that the commentators fall into two categories. Ibn Ezra and Ralbag are among those who say that the *Malachim* were actual men sent by G-d. Others, including Rashi, Ramban and Rashbam, describe them as spiritual entities, which were miraculously provided with a physical human body.

Abarbanel strongly objects to the first explanation. At that point in time Avraham was the world's sole prophet. If there were others on his level, why weren't they commanded in the mitzvah of *brit mila* as well? Additionally, one of the men said to Avraham, "I will return to you". If he was a human prophet he would have said, "And G-d says that I will return to you." No prophet can predict a future event on his own. The fact that they inflicted blindness on the men of Sodom is also an indication that they were not human, as no mere mortal can perform such a miraculous act.

Abarbanel also has difficulty with the second possibility, that they were spiritual entities somehow given human form and substance. Where did this material come from? Was it created out of nothing, like the original universe, or from some other primordial substance, like Adam, the first man? What happens to this substance when these spiritual entities divest themselves of their material shells? Wouldn't we be able to find this material lying around somewhere? Abarbanel

also dismisses the idea that these spiritual entities were composed of some ethereal element that could condense into human form and then return to its previous ethereal state. Whether they were actual physical bodies or some sort of condensed matter, everyone should have been able to see them, which clearly was not the case. Abarbanel proves his point from the story of Elisha in Melachim II (6:17) and Daniel (10:7). In both of these narratives the prophets Elisha and Daniel were able to see a *Malach* when others could not.

As a result of these questions Abarbanel has a radically different understanding of the nature of these *Malachim*. Whether we are referring to the narratives of Avraham and Lot or Elisha and Daniel, all of them perceived 'men' who did not really exist at all. What they saw was not a result of the delirium which sometimes accompanies serious illnesses like malaria. Rather, G-d caused them to see something that didn't exist at all physically when they were healthy, awake and engaged in normal activity. When Elisha asks that G-d should open his disciple's eyes, he is asking G-d to allow him to see something that doesn't really exist. Similarly, Bilaam's donkey saw the *Malach*, while Bilaam did not. In all these cases G-d wanted only certain individuals to interact with the *Malach*, for reasons specific to each case. The miracle was the fact that G-d caused something that did not exist at all to be perceived by only selected individuals.

In summary, G-d did not send three men to speak to Avraham, nor did he transform spiritual entities into physical beings. Rather He created the perception in someone's mind of an entire interaction that did not physically exist at all.

*(Translator's footnote: From a contemporary psychiatric perspective, it is well known that there are many examples of physically healthy, functioning and highly intelligent individuals who hallucinate people, objects, sounds and even interactions that exist only in their minds. They are not the result of delirium brought on by physical disease.)*

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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.

BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

## TROUBLED TIMES

**From: Shlomo**

*Dear Rabbi,  
With all of the terrible attacks taking place in Israel and Jerusalem, I am confused about what the proper Jewish approach or response should be. Should we, or are we permitted, to feel fear? Should we, or are we permitted, to take precautions? If so, what would they be and what should one's intentions be when taking those steps?*

Dear Shlomo,

These are in fact very difficult times, and it's very important to address the concerns you raise, which are shared by many other people as well.

When Jacob was returning to the Land of Israel and about to encounter Esav, he prayed to G-d to spare him because, according to his own admission, Jacob feared him.

Rashi notes that, given G-d's promise to return Jacob and his progeny to the Land of Israel in safety, Jacob should not have been concerned. So what was he afraid of? Rashi explains that he did not fear Esav per se, but rather he feared the consequences of any transgressions he might have had, whose punishment might be meted out through Esav.

So here too, if there is any room for fear, ideally it should be over our transgressions, which should be an impetus for teshuva and improvement.

Even though this is the ideal, the reality is that most people actually do feel varying degrees of physical fear as a result of these types of threats of danger. One who feels this form of fear is not transgressing, but he should still try to transform this fear in a productive way. This can take the form of spiritual improvement as I mentioned, or at least by fostering precautionary measures whose implementation should defuse the fear.

Accordingly, one may and should take steps to guard and protect oneself. This can take many forms, some of which could include: keeping abreast on what's happening when and where in order to avoid going to places of violence; being on the alert wherever one is by paying attention to what's going on within eyeshot in all directions around us, finding a safe balance between being in a crowd and being too far from one; and standing or navigating a course within sheltering or protecting objects.

When one takes these types of precautions, one's intention should not be of panic and despair, but rather of empowerment through fulfilling the Divine command to protect oneself.

## 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.

## SHEMONEH ESREI: SEVENTEENTH BLESSING - PART 2

***Thus said the Lord G-d: Though I have removed them far away among the nations, and though I have scattered them among the lands, I have been for them a small Sanctuary.... (Yechezkel 11:16)***

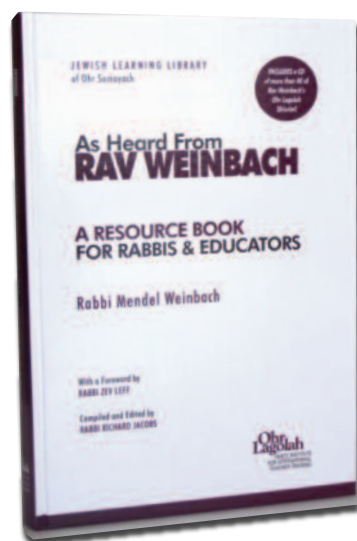
Throughout our long and bitter exile, the Beit Hakknesset, the synagogue, has stood for us as a pillar of refuge in the absence of the holy Temple. Yet, although the Divine presence resides in the synagogues around the world, this fact cannot be seen with our eyes. In Temple times, however, the Divine presence was revealed, and there were constant, open miracles, which strengthened one's faith in G-d and His presence in the world.

Nowadays, in these dark times when G-d hides His countenance from the world, we must rely solely on faith that He remains near to us, albeit in a concealed way. Prayer has the power to draw G-d closer to us, so to speak, revealing His providence to all. And although we are grateful for the privilege to approach G-d with a request for our needs, above all we await the future when we will

be able to "see" G-d, as it is written, "With their own eyes they will see when G-d returns to Zion" (Isaiah 52:8). Then we will be able to serve G-d in the Temple once again.

The above idea can be seen in the order of the blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei. After we conclude the section of requests, we proclaim in the blessing of *Avoda*, the Temple service, "Return the service of the Temple to the Holy of Holies." This expresses our great desire to see an end to the exile and a return to the loyal service of G-d in the Temple.

We can also learn from the order of the blessings what the true result of prayer should be. Drawing close to G-d in prayer should leave a person wanting more. It is not enough to have a small sanctuary where G-d is hidden. Although G-d is together with us in exile, that is certainly not enough. As we conclude our prayers, we cry out, "We want to be with You in the Beit Hamikdash. We want to return to the way things were, when the world saw that we were devoted only to You, through our service in the holy Temple, and that You were devoted only to us, through the fact that You chose to dwell amongst Your nation of Israel."



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## THE WALLACE BROTHERS

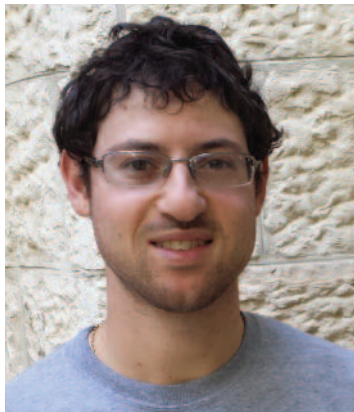
Benjamin Wallace, age 27 - Jeremy Wallace, age 22 - Syracuse, NY

Ohr Somayach is a mosaic of students from different countries, different backgrounds and different talents. We have, or have had in the past, students who are professional actors, singers, dancers, poets, doctors, lawyers, cowboys and Indians. To my knowledge, Benjamin Wallace is the first aspiring professional golfer to honor these halls.

Growing up in Syracuse, New York, Ben attended a conservative synagogue and had an idea, however vague, of Jewish tradition. His passion was golf. An exceptional golfer at Jamesville – DeWitt High School in Syracuse, he was recruited to play golf at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY, not far from Syracuse. Skidmore's golf team is excellent and the college had won a number of national titles. For various reasons he was unhappy at Skidmore and decided to transfer to Colgate, another college with a Division One golf team and also located in upstate New York. He graduated from Colgate with a degree in Political Science and a desire to become a professional golfer. Getting a place on the PGA tour, however, is not for the fainthearted. It takes money and perseverance. To improve his game, Ben travelled between Florida and Washington DC to work at golf courses as a caddy and to take lessons from golf coaches.

Golf lessons cost over \$200 a session and the entrance fees for competitions are high. Caddying is seasonal and the caddy must rely on tips. Without serious financial backing it's very hard to make ends meet. Ben did not have serious financial backing. His parents were okay with his dream, but weren't able to help. When his younger brother, Jeremy, who had just finished his junior year at SUNY Albany in May of 2014,

decided to come to Israel on a Birthright trip, he invited Ben to come along. After the trip Ben started reading more about Judaism and became a regular attendee at Chabad services in Potomac, Maryland. He slowly realized that professional golf and Shabbat observance were not compatible. Almost all tournaments take place from Thursday through Sunday. When his brother suggested that they both come to the Center Program at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Ben readily agreed. "G-d didn't want it (becoming a professional golfer) to happen", says Ben. He loves it here. "The learning is great, the environment is great and the students care about each other." What's his plan for the future? "Maybe real estate investment, but for now I'm going to get a solid foundation in Torah."



Benjamin Wallace

Jeremy graduated from SUNY Albany in May 2015 with a degree in English and a minor in Spanish and film studies. His extracurricular activities in college included acting in Shakespeare plays and also in musicals where he displayed his talents as a dancer and singer. In addition he was involved in TV production, founded his own advertising company and started a monthly magazine. In his "spare time" he worked for Cutco, a multilevel manufacturing and sales company, selling cutlery. Building on the inspiration of his Birthright trip in the summer of 2014, his decision to come to our Center Program was a result of advice from friends and a visit from Rabbi Rueven Katz of Ohr Somayach to SUNY Albany.



Jeremy Wallace

Like his older brother, Jeremy is excited about the program and his future. "*Hinei ma tov u'ma na'im shevet achim gam yachad.*" "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together!"

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