

Parshas Vayera

For the week ending 18 Cheshvan 5756
10 & 11 November 1995

Summary

Three days after performing *Bris Milah* on himself, *Avraham Avinu* is visited by Hashem. 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.

Sara laughs when she hears from them that she will give birth to a son next year. Hashem reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham tries to plead for Sodom to be spared. Hashem agrees that if he finds fifty righteous men in Sodom, He will not destroy it. Avraham manages to 'bargain' Hashem down to ten righteous men. 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 Amora. 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 perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar, where Avimelech abducts Sara. After Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sara and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sara and Avraham. At Hashem's command, on the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sara tells Avraham to banish Hagar and her son Yishmael because she sees in him sure signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but Hashem tells him to listen to whatever Sara tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel, and Hashem promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that Hashem is with him. In a tenth and final test, Hashem instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak who is now 37, and 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, Hashem sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of his unquestioning obedience, Hashem now promises Avraham that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Parsha ends with genealogy and the birth of Rivka.

Commentaries

"For I have loved him (Avraham), because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem..." (18:19).

Our Sages promise that if someone is a Torah scholar, and both his son and grandson are also Torah scholars, then the Torah, like a guest who constantly comes back to stay at the same hotel, will never leave that family.

Given this promise, a great Rabbi of a previous generation was asked why it was that so many Jews have lost their connection to Torah — for since our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov were all Torah scholars, it should be that the Torah should never have become

estranged from their progeny.

The Rabbi answered with an experience of his own: "Once I was traveling from place to place selling a scholarly work that I had authored. I arrived at a town I knew well and knocked on the door of the boarding house where I always stayed. There was no answer. So I turned around and looked for other lodgings. The Torah would tell you the

same story — She knocks on doors and cries out 'Open up for me! Let me come in!' But seeing as no-one answers and no-one opens the door for her, she seeks other lodgings..." When the Torah knocks, all we have to do is to open up our doors!

(Adapted from the Chafetz Chaim)

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(Avraham said:) “Perhaps there are fifty tzadikim in the midst of the city; and will You destroy and not forgive...?” (18:24).

Some irreligious youth were once detailing how they had spent Yom Kippur carousing in bars:

“Yeah - it was great. We had the time of our lives!”

“Did David go too?”

“Nah — not David. He’s a *tzadik*...”

In certain circles, apparently, one can become a ‘*tzadik*’ with very minimal qualifications...

Avraham Avinu knew there were no *tzadikim* in Sodom, so he appealed to Hashem to save the city on behalf of the ‘*tzadikim*’ “in the midst of the city” — i.e. **compared to the rest!** Since people **saw** them as *tzadikim*, the people would not understand why they were being destroyed, and consequently Hashem’s name would be profaned.

(Adapted from Rabbi Zalman Sorotskin in There Shall be Light)

“And Avraham called the name of that place ‘Hashem Yireh’ (G-d will see)” (22:14).

Yerushalyim is a magnificent sight, and all are overwhelmed by its natural beauty. But it is also the spiritual center of the world, and, for the Jew, this is its essence.

The name *Yerushalyim* is a combination of ‘*Yireh*’ — ‘(Hashem) will see’ which is the name Avraham gave it in this verse, and ‘*Shalem*’ - ‘whole’ which is what *Malki-Tzedek* called it in last week’s Parsha. So really, since chronologically the name ‘*Shalem*’ preceded ‘*Yireh*’, its name should have been something like *Shalyim-yeru*. However, the essence of *Yerushalyim* is spiritual, for “*the eyes of Hashem...are always upon it*” and its physical beauty — *shalem* — is secondary. Thus the ‘*Yeru*’ comes before the ‘*shalyim*’.

(Based on Rabbi Meir Shapiro in There Shall be Light — Rabbi Y.M. Goodman)

Haftorah: Melachim II 3:1-37

Just as Avraham and Sara were both old and yet Hashem gave them a child, similarly in this week’s Haftorah, Hashem grants the Shunamite woman and her husband a child. Why then does the Haftorah begin with an entirely different miracle, that of the miraculous oil filling pitcher after pitcher until the penniless widow of the prophet Ovadia became rich? What is the connection between these three women? The answer is that they all excelled in **chesed - in kindness to others**. To this day, Sara is a role-model of the Jewish woman. Her life was an unceasing labor of welcoming guests and teaching them about Hashem. Ovadia’s widow was also a heroine of chesed as depicted in the Haftorah, and the same was true of the Shunamite woman. All three cast the mold, the archetype of the Jewish woman for all generations.

(Adapted from The Midrash Says)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations

Mah Yeduts- `ashuv
“How Beloved...”

M'ein Olam Haba, Shabbos Menucha- מעין עולם הבא שבת מנוחה

A semblance of the World to Come is the Sabbath Day of rest.

A number of comparisons between the Sabbath and the World to Come are suggested by Chassidic commentators:

1. Just as a man’s reward in the World to Come is commensurate with his deeds in this world so the holiness and pleasure he enjoys on Shabbos commensurate with the spiritual investment he has made during the six days of labor preceding it.
2. Just as one can enter the World to Come only after he has completely divested himself of the materialism of this world so can one enter Shabbos only when he has purified himself from the material existence of the previous days.
3. A man can get a clue to what his portion will be in the World to Come according to how much enjoyment he derives from Shabbos.

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