

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The beginning of our Parasha has one of the most well known Biblical stories, when the 3 angels visited Avraham while he was recovering from his circumcision (Beraishis 18:1-22). Desperate to help others in need, G-d sent these angels to give Avraham the peace of mind that only doing good deeds could bring. Avraham was the most gracious host, serving a lavish meal that included cream, milk and tongue (18:8).

But what about the bread? He had promised them bread (18:5), and had asked his wife to bake fresh matzos (after all, it was Pesach). Yet, even though the Torah mentions that he served the meat he prepared, it does not mention his serving any carbs. Why didn't he serve the bread that Sara was asked to bake?

Rashi (based on Bava Metzia 87a and Beraishis Rabbah 48:14) tells us that as she was making the bread, she became a "nidah," and the dough became "tamay" (ritually impure). Although bread that is not "terumah" (baked from wheat separated for a Kohain) or "kadshim" (part of a Temple offering) can be eaten even if it became "tamay," the Talmud (ibid) tells us that Avraham treated all of his food as if it were "kadshim" (to ensure he would be as careful as possible with real "kadshim"). Therefore, he wouldn't eat bread that had become "tamay."

While this would explain why Avraham wouldn't eat it, it doesn't explain why he wouldn't serve it to others, especially if he suspected that those "others" were idol worshippers (see Rashi on 18:4). The Bartenura (among others) suggests that Avraham would never serve something that he himself wouldn't eat. However, the Midrash (Pesikta Rabasi 25) says that when the heavenly angels tried to prevent G-d from giving the Torah to mere humans, He told them that they can't get the Torah, since they didn't keep it

themselves. Where didn't they keep it? When Avraham served them milk and meat together. Although the milk and meat wasn't *cooked* together (if it was Avraham couldn't have served it, since it would have been forbidden to get any benefit from it), it is still forbidden to eat milk after meat, or even meat after milk without first wiping and rinsing the hands and mouth. But whatever it was that they did that was inconsistent with Jewish law, Avraham still allowed them to do it despite not doing it himself.

Others (including the Sifsay Chachamim) suggest that because Sara knew that Avraham wouldn't eat bread that was "tamay," once she became a "nidah" she stopped kneading the dough. And because the dough wasn't being worked on, Avraham was afraid that it had become "chametz" (remember, it was Pesach). Since it is forbidden to derive any benefit from "chametz," he couldn't serve it. However, the reason given for Avraham not serving the bread was that it became "tamay," not that he was afraid it had become "chametz." In this scenario, the "tumah" was only the cause of it possibly becoming "chametz," not the reason he didn't serve it. He didn't serve it because it may have become "chametz."

There's something else quite puzzling about the whole story. Did Avraham know they were angels, or did he think they were real people? If he knew they were angels, why did he feed them? And how could he have suspected that they were idol worshippers? And why did he feel the need to escort them on their way? Rashi even points out (18:16) that he only escorted them because he thought they were human - and this was at the very end of their meeting, even after Avraham had been healed by one of the angels and told about the birth of Yitzchok! It seems rather obvious that from beginning (when he thought they were idol worshippers) to the end (when he escorted them away) Avraham thought they were human.

On the other hand, there are strong indications that Avraham realized that they were really angels. For one thing, the term he used for their hearts ("libchem" with one "bais," rather than "levavchem," with two) was chosen because angels only have one "inclination," towards doing good, while humans have inclinations towards both good and evil (see Rashi on 18:5). If he didn't know they were angels, why would he indicate that they only had one "inclination?" Additionally, what value could Avraham (or Sara) have put in a total

**This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
Lezecher Nishmas
Moras Mascha Rochel bas Mirjam A"H
our unforgettable mother, grandmother and
mother-in-law
in loving memory
Families Treuhaft and Lewenstein**

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

stranger telling them that he would "return in one year and then Sara would have a son?" Only if they knew that this was an angel (or a prophet) could these words be taken seriously. Similarly, Avraham's sudden miraculous recovery from his circumcision should have given their identities away. Finally, as the Toldos Yitzchok points out, how can it be that Hagar was able to recognize an angel, yet Avraham didn't realize that these visitors were really angels? It therefore seems that Avraham must have realized that they were angels, and not just human travelers.

So which one was it? Did Avraham realize they were angels, or did he think they were just people? Rabbeinu Bachya, using a kabbalistic concept, explains that they were in fact both. They were real angels and real people. How? They were real people whose bodies were being controlled by angels (similar to when Satan took over the body of the snake in the Garden of Eden and when an angel took control of Bilaam's donkey). We may be familiar with the concept of a "dybuk," where a soul attaches itself to a body that is still inhabited by its (original) soul, hijacking it for its own uses; here, the angels, who wanted to provide Avraham with the opportunity to feed real people "brought" him three real bodies to feed.

Avraham may have realized what was going on, that he had three angels visiting him while they were occupying three live, real, people. He wanted to make sure that their feet were clean in case the people whose bodies were being controlled were idol worshippers, and he had to feed them (since they had real thirsts to quench and hungers to satiate) and accompany them as they left. By the same token, he hinted to them that he was onto them by referring to their "one" heart, understood how he had been healed, and trusted their prediction of Sara's giving birth.

Angels are purely spiritual beings (even when temporarily controlling human bodies); only G-d is holier. True, they are not obligated to keep the Torah, but this is because it doesn't apply to them, since it is designed for human spiritual growth. Yet, they are completely "kadosh" (holy), and even if they could ingest milk and meat, it is inconceivable that they should come in contact with the opposite of "kedushah," "tumah." Avraham's training at treating all food as if it were "kadshim" paid off, as realizing that his

guests were really angels that were controlling human bodies, he wouldn't serve bread that was "tamay" to beings that were so "kadosh." © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The fundamental issue plaguing the State of Israel today is how to respond to the Palestinians. Is our position to be "not one inch," that the borders of Israel are clearly delineated in the Bible and we are forbidden to relinquish any portion of our Divine patrimony to any other nation, or are we rather duty-bound to seek peace even if it means giving up territory and perhaps in the lack of a genuine peace partner even to unilaterally define our most easily defensible and strategically necessary borders and evacuate the rest of the land to whomever will take it? Fascinatingly enough, both of these positions can be found within our Biblical commentaries - specifically in the manner in which they respectively interpret the very difficult commandment, which the Almighty gives to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a whole burnt offering!

This week's reading of Vayera concludes with one of the most agonizing incidents of the entire Bible: "And it happened after these things, and the Lord tested (or proved, or held aloft as a banner) Abraham.... 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and get yourself going to the Land of Moriah, and lift him up there as a whole burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I shall say to you....'" (Genesis 22:1,2).

This Biblical narrative seems to be linking this most difficult and problematical Divine order to a prior incident, "And it happened after these things...." What things, and how do these things - whatever they may - affect G-d's command to a father to sacrifice his son?

The Rashbam (Rabbenu Shmuel ben Meir, grand-son of the famed Rashi, late eleventh and early twelfth century France), after proving that it is indeed the Biblical style to introduce cause and effect, sin and punishment connections between incidents which follow upon each other, suggest that "here too, after the theory that Abraham cut a covenant with Avimelekh and his children and grand-children (allowing them to continue living in Gerar - Gaza), the Holy one Blessed be He became angry over this; after all, this 'land of the Philistines' is part of the boundaries of Israel. (Abraham is giving up the heritage which G-d had given to Abraham's descendants), so therefore G-d reproved Abraham, He vexed and pained him...It is as though He said, 'You are so proud of the son that I gave you, that you cut a covenant between you and their (Avimelekh's) descendants! Now go and bring him (your son) up as a whole burnt offering, and see what benefit this covenant (with Avimelekh) will bring to you?..." (Rashbam ad loc).

In effect, the Rashbam is castigating Abraham for signing away the patrimony - a portion of the Land of Israel - which G-d has given to his descendants. Abraham has no right to cede in treaty property which doesn't belong to him alone but rather to succeeding generations. This is what Yitzhak Tabenkin explained to David Ben Gurion, when he advised him to refuse one of the early partition plans, which would have granted us an extremely paltry State of Israel. "I took counsel with two individuals, and they convinced me that you must reject the offer. I asked my grand-father and I asked my grand-son; my grand-father is dead for ten years, and my grand-son has not yet been born..."

At the same time, however, there is another commentary reported in the name of the Midrash Enelow: " 'And it happened after these things' - after Abraham sent away Hagar and Yishmael just one chapter before. Then, as now, 'Abraham rose up early in the morning' after having heard the command of Sarah his wife confirmed by G-d, to banish Hagar, the hand-maiden and his first-born son Yishmael; Abraham sends them with bread and a jug of water - but without gold and silver, and even without sufficient provisions for a desert journey. 'And he (Abraham) sent her (Hagar) away, and she went and she wandered in the desert' - just as Abraham will then be forced to go and wander among the mountains with his son Isaac. 'And she went and she sat opposite, the distance of the fling of arrow, saying I do not wish to see the death of the child'; Abraham caused Hagar to see her son die, and he will be forced to see - and even effectuate - Isaac's death. 'And an angel of G-d called out to Hagar from the heavens' informing her that Yishmael shall live and become a great nation, just as an angel of G-d will stop Abraham's hand, and promise that a great and numerous nation will emerge from Isaac..."

Was the Akedah a punishment for Abraham's insensitivity towards Yishmael? Yes, he was to banish the handmaid and her son, but he was not to execute them by sending them out to an alien, torrid desert as penniless paupers and with a dearth of provisions. No less an authority (and passionate lover of Israel) than the Ramban takes Abraham to task earlier when Sarah afflicted Hagar (for treating her mistress "lightly") and caused her to flee: "our matriarch sinned by this affliction, and so did Abraham by allowing her to act in such a manner. And so G-d heard her pain and gave her a son who would become a wild ass of a man, and will afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all types of affliction" (Ramban, on Genesis 16:6).

It is quite possible that the Bible does believe that eventually we - the children of Isaac and the children of Yishmael - shall be destined to share this land of the Middle East, the vertex of the world civilizations. Perhaps, G-d only wished that the two boys not grow up together - because of the bad influence Yishmael can have upon the still immature

and yet - untrained and callow Isaac; perhaps the problem lay with Hagar, who was unwilling to compromise, who would not allow a shared inheritance, who would not stand for "the son of this hand-maid inheriting together with Isaac" (Gen 21:10). After all, it is the angel of heaven who prophesies that 'he (Yishmael) shall dwell in the face of all of his brothers" (Gen 16:12), and it is the Bible that informs us that Yishmael eventually repents (Gen 25:9, Rashi ad loc).

If the eternal words of the Bible are great enough and inclusive enough to allow for diverse and conflicting explanations, ought we not be able to likewise allow for and respect diverse and conflicting viewpoints?! © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Avraham pleads for the forgiveness and survival of Sodom. He strikes the best bargain he apparently can with G-d, so to speak. If there are ten righteous people in Sodom then the city will be spared. There is a sizable population living in Sodom so Avraham is somehow confident that he has saved the city once the number of necessary righteous inhabitants has been reduced to ten. This is perhaps the reason that Avraham does not bargain for a number lower than ten. But Avraham is sadly disappointed. Sodom does not contain even ten righteous people and the avenging angels do their work of retribution and destruction.

My teachers often pointed out to my colleagues and me during our yeshiva years that Sodom was not destroyed because of its tens of thousands of evildoers. It was destroyed because it lacked ten good people. Once again, here in the story of Sodom, the Torah reiterates to us the value of an individual, of a good person, of a good deed performed for its own sake, how in the eyes of Heaven goodness always trumps evil. Therefore Judaism places great responsibility upon the individual and his or her personal behavior. Rambam makes this point when he states that before doing an act in life one should always consider that the whole world is evenly balanced at that moment between good and evil, salvation and destruction. The act about to be performed if it is one of goodness can save the entire world. And if it is wrong and evil, selfish and uncaring, it can doom all of humankind.

A second lesson inherent in the story of Sodom is that even the most righteous person in the world our father Avraham cannot save other people simply with his blessings and entreaties. People, communities, nations, have to save themselves. Avraham can guide and teach, serve as an example and role model, influence and lead, but in the last analysis only Sodom can save Sodom, only Lot can save Lot. There is a great reliance in the religious and general world upon

others to somehow pull us through. People are willing to invest a great deal of time, effort and money to obtain the blessings of a righteous person to solve their problems. The same effort invested in their own personal attempts to improve themselves in their daily behavior would perhaps produce greater and more beneficial results than blessings from others, no matter how great those others are. The rabbis of the Talmud when asked for blessings often asked the supplicant: What good deed have you done in your lifetime? A blessing can have no good effect if the person receiving it has no personal merit. The Talmud stated the great rule in life: Your behavior will bring you closer [to G-d and humans] and in the alternative your behavior will distance you from them. Avraham is powerless to save Sodom without the cooperation of the inhabitants of Sodom. This is truly the bitter and telling lesson of this weeks parsha. It is one that should be studied and internalized by us all. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As Hagar sits a distance from her dying son Yishmael an angel appears and declares "Mah lakh Hagar? What ails you Hagar?" (Genesis 21:17) One may claim that this question is actually rhetorical for G-d's emissary obviously knows what is bothering Hagar.

In truth, rhetorical questions play an important role in the Torah and usually appear in order to present a criticism. For example, when G-d asks Adam, "Ayeka," after he ate from the tree of the Garden of Eden he obviously knew where, physically, Adam was located. (Genesis 3:9) G-d was actually making a clear statement to Adam, criticizing him and asking him, "What have you done? Why did you disobey Me?"

One wonders then why was the angel critical of Hagar in our narrative?

Keep in mind that G-d had previously promised Hagar that she would have a child who would "dwell in the face of all his brethren." (Genesis 16:12) G-d later tells Avraham that Yishmael would become "a great nation," (Genesis 17:20) - a promise Avraham no doubt shared with Hagar. Still, here in the desert Hagar feared for Yishmael's life for she sensed that his death was imminent (Genesis 21:16). Her feeling displayed a loss of faith in the Divine promise. When the angel asks "what ails you Hagar?" he actually is asking Hagar, "What is wrong? Have you lost faith in G-d?!"

Rabbi David Silber notes that whenever the Torah uses the term to'eh it means to wander. Not in the physical sense but in the metaphysical one-to stray

from the right path. Not coincidentally the Torah in the Hagar narrative states she strayed, va-teyta, in the wilderness. (Genesis 21:14) This confirms our belief that in this case, Hagar had lost her spiritual way.

This idea of to'eh is also found when Avraham, for a second time, declares that Sarah is his sister. He tells Avimelech, "and it came to pass when G-d caused me to wander (hit-u)." (Genesis 20:13) Here, Avraham is straying. He misidentifies Sarah as his sister, rather than pointing out that she is his covenantal wife from whom the second patriarch would come.

The term to'eh is found in one other place in Genesis. When Joseph seeks out his brethren, the Torah states, "And behold, he was wondering (to'eh) in the field." (Genesis 37:15) Once again, wander, to'eh, means that Joseph was not only lost physically. He had lost his sense of brotherhood, and he also bore responsibility for breaking up the family unit.

In all these cases the personalities who were to'eh, eventually found their way back. Yishmael is saved; Avraham recognizes that Sarah is his covenantal wife and Yitzchak his covenantal son; Joseph and his brothers unite. This teaches all of us the power to return and to correct our mistakes.

Everyone will be to'eh. Inevitably everyone makes mistakes. The question is not whether one will stray, rather how will we respond when we stray. Will we give in to our leanings and continue to be in a state of to'eh, or will we stand up and rise against the tide and work on our souls and our lives until we get back on the road of holiness and connection and walk the straight path. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's Haftorah reveals to us an incredible dimension of faith and its astounding result. Out of deep appreciation to a Shunamite lady's hospitality the Prophet Elisha promised that she would bear a son. This startling prediction raised major concern due to her elderly state coupled with her physical inability of bearing children. Indeed, she sensed some reservation in Elisha's words and expressed her strong desire that the child live a full, healthy life. (see Malbim's comment to 4:14,16) Elisha responded by repeating his promise and predicting the date of her son's birth. His promise was fulfilled and she gave birth to a boy on the exact date of prediction. When the boy matured, sudden tragedy befell him and he took seriously ill and died soon after in his mother's arms. The Shunamite lady did not despair and immediately traveled to Elisha. Upon arrival she calmly reminded him of his promise, whereupon Elisha ordered his servant to rush to the scene of her motionless child. Elisha prayed to Hashem and warmed the boy's body and Hashem responded and returned the child to life.

When reading these p'sukim we are overwhelmed by the Shunamite's manner in dealing with her son's sudden passing. Scriptures record her response and state, "She arose, placed the (dead) child on the prophet's bed, closed the door and left." (4:21) There is no mention here of any emotional outburst, cry of despair or feeling of grief or anguish. Scriptures continue to relate that she calmly requested a donkey and informed her husband that she was rushing to the prophet on a peaceful journey. Even after arriving at Elisha's doorstep she maintained that everything at home was in order. Only after entering his private quarters did she allude to his promise and hint to the seriousness of her situation.

This entire episode reveals the Shunamite's incredible strength of character rooted in her total faith in Hashem and His prophets. She displayed an unparalleled degree of trust and regarded physical impossibilities within the realm of reality. Her conviction in Hashem was so strong that she sincerely anticipated His performance of a miracle of major proportions. She simply refused to accept that her miracle boy's life ended so soon. She reasoned that if Hashem defied His rules of nature to grace her with a son He could likewise defy them and return her son to life. Since Hashem accepted Elisha's first request for a miracle Hashem would conceivably accept Elisha's second request for another miracle. Therefore, with total conviction she calmly awaited a nearly unprecedented experience—the revival of her dead son. Indeed, Hashem rewarded her for this perfect faith and she merited to witness one of Hashem's greatest revelations of all times.

Where did she develop such faith and conviction? Although we know that Hashem's ability is limitless we are also aware of the improbability of His altering His master plan for the world. The revival of the dead is an experience reserved, for the most part, for the end of days and is not meant to happen before then. Prior to the Shunamite's miracle world history saw the revival of two people, our Patriarch Yitzchok during the Akeida and the Tzorfati boy revived by the Prophet Eliyahu. (see Pirkei DR' Eliezer 31, M'lochim 1 17:22) How could this Shunamite even dream of such supernatural occurrences, let alone believe that they would happen to her son?

One could suggest that she drew her strength from a lesson in this week's sedra. We read this week about three common travelers who informed our Patriarch Avrohom that his wife, Sora would bear a son. Sora, a ninety year old barren lady whose husband was also quite elderly, didn't place much value on this prediction. In fact, she found the travelers' words somewhat amusing and chuckled at the notion of her bearing a child at her ripe age. Hashem reprimanded her and said, "Why did Sora laugh saying, 'Can I give birth when I am so aged?'" Hashem continued and

said, "Is anything out of Hashem's reach?" (Breishis 18:14) We are somewhat puzzled by this dialogue. Sora's response merely reflected the true improbability of child bearing at her ripe age. Why should she, physically incapable of giving birth and well past that stage, entertain the bizarre phenomena of returning to her youth? Nachmanides places this in perspective and reminds us that this prediction came from three angels disguised as ordinary Arabs. Our Matriarch Sora was totally unaware of their true identity and seemingly responded in a most appropriate way. She certainly appreciated their blessing but had long given up on considering such ridiculous things. Nachmanides questions why then did Hashem fault and reprimand her for a natural and logical response?

He answers that Sora's faith in Hashem should have exceeded such physical restrictions. With her level of knowledge she should have entertained the possibility of the nearly impossible. She should have believed that such miracles could actually happen or respond, at least, by wishing that Hashem willed them to be so. Sora's profound understanding of Hashem's ways should have left room in her mind for even the most remote of suggestions. She certainly realized that Hashem could do anything and should have eagerly entertained the fulfillment of this blessing. (Nachmanides to Breishis 18:15)

This interpretation, apparently, understands that Sora should have valued the blessing of common ordinary travelers. Indeed, the Sages teach us never to take anyone's blessing or curse lightly because of their possible degree of truth. (Mesichta Baba Kamma 93a) In this vein, even the seemingly ridiculous words of ordinary Arabs has merit. Who knows if their words were not a reflection of a miraculous development in the near future. Although it was highly improbable for this to be so, the possibility did exist and should not have been overlooked. Maybe these travelers were angels in disguise delivering a message from Above! Our Matriarch Sora's chuckle reflected that child bearing for her was outside of reality. Hashem reprimanded her and reminded her that nothing is ever outside of reality. If she had considered things from Hashem's perspective she would have concluded that nothing is beyond His capability or difficult to bring about.

Sora should have hearkened to the definitive tone of the travelers' prediction. As remote as it seemed the Arab travelers may have been sending her a message. After all, Sora was privileged to witness Hashem's involvement in every step of her life. Hashem therefore expected her never to limit His degree of involvement and respond favorably to this most remote prediction or blessing and contemplate its possible reality.

One could suggest that the Shunamite lady thoroughly absorbed this lesson and applied it to her

own predicament. She, in fact, already merited to witness a miracle of major proportions. She was also incapable of child bearing and well on in her years before she miraculously conceived her son. Once she experienced this, she thoroughly researched Hashem's guidelines for miracles and concluded that nothing was beyond reality. She totally identified with this principle and continuously viewed her son's existence in this light. When her sudden tragedy occurred she saw in it the perfect opportunity to practice her belief. Drawing on her inner principles of faith she immediately engaged them into action. She fully believed that her son's death was no cause for despair because Hashem could easily restore him if He so willed. Consequently, she immediately traveled to Elisha and elicited him to daven for a miracle. Her unwavering faith served her well and in its merit Hashem responded to Elisha's prayers and restored her son to life.

We consistently daven to Hashem to end our troubles and bring us the long awaited Messianic era. For many people it is difficult to conceptualize or fathom how this phenomena will come about. At present, there are so many obstacles in the way that any stage of redemption will require unprecedented miracles. In the recent tragic American experience Hashem displayed untold levels of compassion. Close to one thousand souls were spared from a horrifying death due to unexpected Divine intervention. For those fortunate people Hashem's perfectly timed miracles will undoubtedly remind them of His constant involvement in their lives. But, even we who are privileged to learn of these miracles can draw inspiration from them. Let us daven to Hashem that as He has begun showing us His open hand He should continue doing so until the entire world recognizes His sovereignty and warm relationship with His devout children. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

There are many parallel elements in the ways that Avraham and Lot welcomed guests. With respect to Avraham, "He saw them and ran to them from the entrance of the tent and bowed down to the ground. And he said, my masters if I have found favor in your eyes, do not pass your servant by... wash your feet... eat your fill, and then you can leave" [Bereishit 18:2-5]. With respect to Lot, "And Lot saw them and rose before them, and he bowed down to the ground twice. And he said, behold my masters, please come to your servant's house to sleep, and you will wash your feet, and you may rise early and be on your way... And he made a feast for them and baked matzot." [19:1-3]. Aside from a few minor aspects, it seems that the main difference between the two descriptions is the conditions of the two men. While Avraham is in his own area, Lot lives in

Sedom, and in order to protect his guests he places himself and his family into mortal danger.

It seems that the comparison between Lot and Avraham does not end there. Just after both men welcome the guests they hear from the angels about the plan to destroy the site, and both make an attempt to halt the disaster. In his famous dialogue with the Almighty, Avraham carries on a negotiation about the minimum number of righteous men that will be needed to rescue the city if they exist, obtaining a Divine promise in the end that "I will not destroy the place because of ten righteous men" [18:32]. Avraham does not go below the number ten, evidently because he assumes that too strong a plea will not be accepted (see Rashi).

However, Lot succeeds where Avraham fails. Lot takes his time in leaving the city, because it is difficult for him to leave his home, his sons-in-law, and his married daughters, and he is forcefully removed from the city by the angels and told to run away to the mountains. But Lot is not able, both physically and perhaps also mentally, to move so far away from his place, fearing that "evil will overtake me and I will die" [19:19]. So Lot asks for one more favor, "Behold, this city is close and it is possible to run there, it can provide salvation. Let me run away there, it is a small place, and I can continue to live." [19:20]. Lot clearly understands that in order to rescue himself it is necessary to save the entire city, and he therefore explains why it is not right to overturn this city, which is a "refuge," a small city, not a large one like Sedom. In the end his request is granted-"Behold, I have acceded to you even in this thing, not to overturn the city about which you spoke" [19:21]. This is true even though the people of Tzo'ar were no different in principle than the people of Sedom, as can be seen a short time later, when Lot left the city "because he was afraid to remain in Tzo'ar" [19:30].

How was Lot able to rescue a city in the area of Sedom, something which even his well known uncle failed to accomplish? The answer is simple. Avraham's request to save the cities was based on justice and right, acting as an external observer, with the plea, "Will you destroy a righteous man together with an evil one?" [18:23]. Lot, on the other hand, who lived in Sedom but continued to follow the path of Avraham, had a special privilege, and this was enough to rescue a small city, even though it did not have ten righteous men but only one.

Clearly, Lot's character was complex, as can be seen by the story of the birth of his grandsons, Amon and Moav. However, in spite of this, his dedication to his way of life, even in the midst of Sedom, gave him a very special status- the ability to rescue an entire community. This is related to the fact that he was part of the community and did not live outside it.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Meting Justice- Meeting Kindness

In what must be one of the greatest transitional scenes in the entire Biblical narrative, this week the Torah transposes us from the gracious home of Avraham in one scene and to the evil city of S'dom in the next. Avraham's home was one of kindness. It was a home where the master of the house would run to greet nomadic wanderers, and invite them into his abode only three days after a bris milah! It was a home in which Sora had opened a door in every direction, ensuring that there was an unrestricted invitation to any wayfarer, no matter which direction he or she came from.

The scene switches to S'dom, a city in which kindness and charity were unheard of. A city in which a damsel who committed the terrible crime of feeding a pauper, was smeared with honey and set out for the bees. Sdom was a city where visitors who had the audacity to ask for overnight lodging were treated to a special type of hospitality. They were placed in beds, and then, if they were too short for the beds, their limbs were tortuously stretched to fit the bed; if they were larger than the beds their limbs were chopped off.

How does the Torah make the transition from the world of kindness and charity to the world of evil? The Parsha tells us the story of three angels who visited Avraham. Each had a mission. Rashi tells us, "one to announce to Sarah the birth of a son, one to overthrow Sodom, and one to cure Abraham." You see, three were needed as one angel does not carry out two commissions. "Raphael," explains Rashi, "who healed Abraham went on to rescue Lot, as healing and saving may be one mission." And so the scene moves from Avraham in Eilonai mamrei to Lot in S'dom, where the angels posing again as wayfarers were graciously invited. They saved the hospitable Lot and destroyed the rest of the city.

I have a simple question. Why did the angel who was sent to destroy S'dom make a stop at Avraham's home? Two angels could have gone to Avraham's home, one to heal Avraham and the other to inform Sora of the good news. The third could have gone directly to S'dom and waited there for the others to catch up. Why make a detour to Avraham?

Traditionally, young children who start learning Talmud, are introduced to Tractate Bava Metzia in general and the chapter Eilu M'tziyos in particular. The tractate deals with property law and emphasizes respect for other people's possessions. Eilu M'tziyos stresses the laws of returning lost items and the responsibilities of a finder of those objects. Some wanted the boys to learn about the blessings, but Rav Moshe Feinstein insisted that the custom not be

changed. He wanted to imbue the youngsters of the enormous responsibilities that they have to their fellow man. One cannot be a Jew only in shul where he can sway, pray, and recite blessings, but one must also be also be a Jew in the outside world, where the tests of honesty arise each day.

I heard the story of one of those youngsters, who found his way off the beaten yeshiva path. His college-years search for spirituality found him studying with a yogi in Bombay, India who railed against Western comforts and derided the culture of materialism. He preached peace, love, and harmony while decrying selfishness and greed. The young man was enamored with his master's vociferous objections to Western society, until he was together with him on a Bombay street. A wallet lay on the ground. There was cash and credit cards sticking out from it. It was clearly owned by an American tourist. The Yogi picked it up and put it in his sarong. "But it may belong to someone," protested his young charge. "It is a gift from the G-ds," he answered, "heaven meant it for us" The young man's protests fell on deaf ears.

At that moment, the words of his Rabbi back in fifth grade rang in his ears. "These are the items that must be announced for return; any item with an identifying sign"

He was stirred by truth of his traditions, and the purity of his past. He left the Yogi and the wallet, and eventually returned to a Torah life.

It is easy to rail against others. It is easy to talk about loose morals and unethical behavior. It's even easy to destroy Sdom. But Hashem did not let the angels do just that. He told them all to them first visit Avraham. He wanted them to see what kindness really means. See an old man run to greet total strangers. See a 90-year-old woman knead dough to bake you fresh bread. Meet the man who will plead for mercy on behalf of S'dom. And then, and only then can you mete the punishment that they truly deserve. Because without studying the good, we cannot understand the true flaws of the bad. Without watching Abraham commit true kindness, we should not watch the inhabitants of Sdom get their due. © 2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This week's parsha records several dramatic events: the birth of Isaac; Abraham's unsuccessful plea to save the evil population of Sodom; the destruction of Sodom and Lot's rescue; and finally the Akaida (binding) of Isaac. The meaning of Abraham's binding and intended sacrifice of his beloved son, Isaac, has been interpreted in various ways.

We will compare Rashi's interpretation with that of his grandson, Rashbam. "And it was after these

events that G-d tested Abraham and He said to him, 'Abraham,' and he said, 'Here I am.'" (Genesis 22:1)

"After these events (words)"-RASHI: "There are those of our Rabbis who say the meaning is: After the words of the Satan who accused (Abraham) and said, 'Of the banquet which Abraham made he did not sacrifice even one bull or ram (in thanksgiving to G-d).' Then (G-d) said to him 'Did he not do all this only for his son, and if I would say to him 'Slaughter your son for Me,' he would not refuse!' Other (Rabbis) say, 'After the words of Ishmael, who boasted to Isaac, that he (Ishmael) allowed himself to be circumcised at the age of 13 and did not protest. Isaac said to him 'With one part of your body (the circumcision) are you boasting to me! If G-d would ask me to sacrifice myself (completely) I would not refuse.'"

Rashi is clearly relating to the Torah's words "After these devarim." The Hebrew word "devarim" can mean either "events" or "words." The fact that the Torah begins this section of the Akaida with the word "After" implies that there is some kind of connection with previous verses. Which verses? This uncertainty lead to the two opinions of the Rabbis that Rashi cites. The first opinion refers back to verse 21:8 where Abraham's feast for Isaac's being weaned at two years old is described. The second opinion refers further back to verse 21:4 where Isaac's circumcision at eight days is mentioned. That Ishmael was circumcised at age 13 is mentioned even earlier, in verse 17:25.

The Torah's use of the word "nisa" is usually taken to mean "tested"; that is, G-d was testing Abraham to see if his faith was steadfast and his obedience would stand up to this difficult test.

Also, after Abraham showed his willingness to do anything for his G-d, the Torah testifies to this. Verse 22:12 says: "...for now I know that you are G-d-fearing, for you have not withheld your only son from Me."

All the commentaries follow this line.

Why does the All Knowing G-d need to test Abraham to know the extent of his faith in G-d? He certainly knows each man's heart, so why the need for a test?

Ramban explains that in this case the test served the purpose of allowing Abraham to actualize his inner potential. Although G-d knew that Abraham had the faith to perform the difficult act of sacrificing his dearly beloved son, even so, once a person acts on his inner belief, he has given that belief more validity.

Rashbam (Rashi's grandson) offers an original, startling, view of this "test." He says: "...After Abraham made a treaty with Avimelech, between him, their sons, their grandsons and their great grandsons, then G-d was angry with him because the land of the Philistines was part of the Land of Israel and the Holy One commanded 'You shall not let live any soul'; therefore, G-d 'provoked'" Abraham, and caused him pain."

(Rashbam then cites examples in Tanach where the word "nisa" means "provoked" and not "tested".)

Rashbam continues: "This is to say that he (Abraham) was proud of the son that G-d had given him and made a covenant for this son and Avimelech's son. Now (says G-d) bring him as an offering on the altar and we will see what becomes of your covenant."

The Rashbam continues by quoting a Midrash, that Hashem made an oath: "since you offered seven sheep (in the covenant ceremony) the Philistines will kill seven of your Righteous and destroy seven of your temples: Ohel Moed, Gilgal, Nov, Shilo, Givon, and the two Temples."

This is really a startling interpretation (and of timely relevance!). Can you find textual validity for Rashbam's interpretation over Rashi's?

An Answer: Both Rashi and Rashbam are connecting the chapter of the Akaida with a previous event. The two interpretations that Rashi offers are both based on drash not p'shat. The Torah does not record Ishmael's conversation with Isaac nor the conversation between the Satan and Hashem.

Rashbam's interpretation, on the other hand, is very close to p'shat, because the Akaida does come after the covenant which was explicitly made between Abraham's son and Avimelech's son. And we also know that Israel was commanded not to make a treaty with the inhabitants of the Land and instead to destroy them. Abraham had gone against this command. The terrifying provocation of G-d to kill his son was his punishment!

I find the lesson from this interpretation both startling and eye-opening! Living in Jerusalem at this point in time of our vicissitude-filled history, I am wondering if the Torah (according to Rashbam) is not speaking to us. Are such thoughts "merely" political or are they p'shat?! © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org



(c)2000 Sarah Kranz

<http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article.asp?AID=3171>