

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

"**G**od appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men were standing over against him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent entrance, and bowed down to the earth..." (Genesis 18:1-2) Thus Parshat Vayera opens with one of the most famous scenes in the Bible: Abraham's meeting with the three enigmatic strangers. The text calls them men. We later discover that they were in fact angels, each with a specific mission.

The chapter at first glance seems simple, almost fable-like. It is, however, complex and ambiguous. It consists of three sections:

Verse 1: God appears to Abraham.

Verses 2-16: Abraham meets the men/angels.

Verses 17-33: The dialogue between God and Abraham about the fate of Sodom.

The relationship between these sections is far from clear. Do they represent one scene, two or three?

The most obvious possibility is three. Each of the above sections is a separate event. First, God appears to Abraham, as Rashi explains, "to visit the sick" (Rashi to Bereishit 18:1; Sotah 14a) after Abraham's circumcision. Then the visitors arrive with the news that Sarah will have a child. Then takes place the great dialogue about justice and the imminent punishment of the people of Sodom.

Maimonides suggests that there are only two scenes: The visit of the angels, and the dialogue with God. The first verse does not describe an event at all; it is, rather, a chapter heading. (Moreh Nevuhim 11:42) It tells us that the events that follow are all part of a prophetic revelation, a divine -- human encounter.

The third possibility is that we have a single continuous scene. God appears to Abraham, but before He can speak, Abraham sees the passers-by and asks God to wait while he serves them food. Only when they have departed -- in verse 17 -- does he turn to God, and the conversation begins.

The interpretation of the chapter affects -- and hinges upon -- the way we translate the word Adonai in Abraham's appeal: "Please Adonai, if now I have found favour in your sight, do not pass by, I pray you, from your servant" (18:3). Adonai can be a reference to one

of the names of God. It can also be read as "my lords" or "sirs." In the first case, Abraham would be addressing God. In the second, he would be speaking to the passers-by.

The same linguistic ambiguity appears in the next chapter (19:2), when two of Abraham's visitors -- now described as angels -- visit Lot in Sodom: "And the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot sat by the city gates. When he saw them, he rose to meet them and bowing low, he said, 'I pray you now, adonai, turn aside to your servant's house and tarry all night and bathe your feet and you shall rise up early and go on your way.'" (Gen. 19:1-2)

As there is no contextual element to suggest that Lot might be speaking to God, it seems clear, in this case, that adonai refers to the visitors.

The simplest reading then of both texts -- the one concerning Abraham, the other, Lot -- would be to read the word consistently as "sirs." Several English translations indeed take this approach. Here, for example, is the New English Bible's: "The Lord appeared to Abraham... He looked up, and saw three men standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the opening of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. 'Sirs,' he said, 'if I have deserved your favour, do not pass by my humble self without a visit.'"

Jewish tradition, however, does not.

Normally, differences of interpretation of biblical narrative have no halachic implications. They are matters of legitimate disagreement. This case of Abraham's addressee is unusual, however, because if we translate Adonai as "God," it is a holy name, and both the writing of the word by a scribe, and the way we treat a parchment or document containing it, have special stringencies in Jewish law. If, by contrast, we translate it as "my lords" or "sirs," it has no special sanctity. Jewish law rules that in the scene with Lot, adonai is read as "sirs," but in the case of Abraham it is read as "God."

This is an extraordinary fact, because it



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suggests that Abraham actually interrupted God as He was about to speak, asking Him to wait while he attended to the visitors. According to tradition, the passage should be read thus: "The Lord appeared to Abraham...He looked up and saw three men standing over against him. On seeing them, he hurried from his tent door to meet them, and bowed down. [Turning to God] he said: 'My God, if I have found favour in Your eyes, do not leave Your servant [i.e. Please wait until I have given hospitality to these men].' [He then turned to the men and said:] 'Let me send for some water so that you may bathe your feet and rest under this tree...'" (See Shabbat 127a)

This daring interpretation became the basis for a principle in Judaism: "Greater is hospitality than receiving the Divine Presence." (Ibid. See also Shavuot 35b.) Faced with a choice between listening to God, and offering hospitality to what seemed to be human beings, Abraham chose the latter. God acceded to his request, and waited while Abraham brought the visitors food and drink, before engaging him in dialogue about the fate of Sodom. How can this be so? It seems disrespectful at best, heretical at worst, to put the needs of human beings before attending on the presence of God.

What the passage is telling us, though, is something of immense profundity. The idolaters of Abraham's time worshipped the sun, the stars, and the forces of nature as gods. They worshipped power and the powerful. Abraham knew, however, that God is not in nature but beyond nature. There is only one thing in the universe on which He has set His image: the human person, every person, powerful and powerless alike.

The forces of nature are impersonal, which is why those who worship them eventually lose their humanity. As the book of Psalms puts it: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. / They have mouths, but cannot speak, / Eyes, but cannot see; / They have ears, but cannot hear, nostrils but cannot smell... / They that make them become like them, / And so do all who put their trust in them." (Psalms 115:4-8)

One cannot worship impersonal forces and remain a person; compassionate, humane, generous, forgiving. Precisely because we believe that God is

personal, someone to whom we can say "You," we honour human dignity as sacrosanct.

Abraham, father of monotheism, knew the paradoxical truth that to live the life of faith is to see the trace of God in the face of the stranger. It is easy to receive the Divine Presence when God appears as God. What is difficult is to sense the Divine Presence when it comes disguised as three anonymous passers-by. That was Abraham's greatness. He knew that serving God and offering hospitality to strangers were not two things but one.

In one of the most beautiful comments on this episode, Rabbi Shalom of Belz notes that in verse 2, the visitors are spoken of as standing above Abraham (nitzavim alav), while in verse 8, Abraham is described as standing above them (omed aleihem). At first, the visitors were higher than Abraham because they were angels and he a mere human being. But when he gave them food and drink and shelter, he stood even higher than the angels. (Dover Shalom ad loc.; cited in Peninei Hassidut [Jerusalem] to Bereishit 18:2)

By choosing the most radical of the three possible interpretations of Genesis 18, the sages allowed us to hear one of the most fundamental principles of the life of faith: We honour God by honouring His image, humankind. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**T**ake your son, your only son, the one whom you love, Isaac, and dedicate him there for a burnt offering [or a dedication, literally, a lifting up] on one of the mountains which I will tell you of." (Genesis 22:2) As we have seen, there are manifold possibilities of interpreting God's most difficult directive to Abraham. But in order for us to truly appreciate the eternal quality of Torah, let us examine how the martyrs of Jewish history have taken – and drawn inspiration from – this drama of the Akeda (binding).

In the city of Worms, in 1096, some 800 people were killed in the course of two days at the end of the month of Iyar. In the Last Trial,* Professor Shalom Spiegel's study of the Akeda, he records a chronicle of that period that cites a declaration by one of the community's leaders, Rabbi Meshulam bar Isaac:

All you great and small, hearken unto me. Here is my son that God gave me and to whom my wife Tziporah gave birth in her old age. Isaac is this child's name. And now I shall offer him up as father Abraham offered up his son Isaac.

Sadly, the chronicle concludes with the father slaying the boy himself, in the presence of his wife. When the distraught parents leave the room of their

sacrifice, they are both cruelly slaughtered by the murdering Christians. Spiegel quotes from a dirge of the time:

Compassionate women in tears, with their own hands slaughtered, as at the Akeda of Moriah. Innocent souls withdrew to eternal life, to their station on high...

The biblical story of the binding of Isaac is replayed via the Talmudic invocation of the ram's horn (shofar) each year on Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment and Renewal. The shofar symbolizes the ram substitute for Isaac on Mount Moriah; God commands that we hearken to the cries of this shofar 'in order that I may remember for your benefit the binding of Isaac the son of Abraham, and I shall account it for you as if you yourselves bound yourselves up before Me' [Rosh Hashanah 16a]. This message of the shofar has inspired Jews of all generations to rise to the challenge of martyrdom, whenever necessary, transforming themselves into Abrahams and Sarahs, placing their precious children on the altar of Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of the divine name.

Indeed, there was apparently a stubborn tradition which insisted that Abraham actually went through with the act of sacrifice. After all, following the biblical command of the angel to Abraham (the *deus ex machina* as it were) – 'Do not cast your hand against the lad' [Gen. 22:19]. Where is Isaac? If indeed, his life has just been saved, why doesn't he accompany his father, why don't they go together to the lads, why don't they – father and son – return home to Be'er Sheva and Sarah together (as they have been twice described as doing – father and son walking together – in the context of the Akeda story)?!

Moreover, when they first approached the mountain of sacrifice, Abraham tells the young men to wait down below: 'I and the boy will go yonder; we will worship and we will come back to you' [Gen. 22:5]. So why does the text have Abraham return alone? On the basis of this textual problem, Ibn Ezra (1089–1164) makes mention of an interpretation that suggests that Abraham literally followed God's command, slaying his son, and that God later on miraculously brought Isaac back to life. It is precisely that stark and startling deletion of Isaac's name from the conclusion of the biblical account of the Akeda itself, which gave countless generations of Jewish martyrs the inspiration for their sacrifice; and this is the case, even though Ibn Ezra felt compelled to deny the tradition as inaccurate:

'Isaac is not mentioned. But he who asserts that Abraham slew Isaac and abandoned him, and that afterwards Isaac came to life again, is speaking contrary to the biblical text' [Ibn Ezra, Gen. 22:1]. Ibn Ezra is obviously making reference to a commentary – which Jewish martyrdom would not allow to fall into oblivion.

The earliest reference to this notion of Isaac's

actual sacrifice is probably the Midrash Hagadol which cites R. Eleazer ben Pedat, a first generation Amora of the Talmud:

Although Isaac did not die, Scripture regards him as though he had died. And his ashes lay piled on the altar. That's why the text mentions Abraham and not Isaac.

And perhaps one might argue that Isaac was so traumatized by the Akeda that a specific aspect of him – the part of his personality which would always remain on the altar – did die. After all, Isaac is the most ethereal and passive of the patriarchs, called by the Midrash – even after the binding – the *olah temimah*, the whole burnt offering. But this psychological interpretation and Ibn Ezra's rejection notwithstanding, the penitential Slichot prayers still speak of the 'ashes of Isaac' on the altar, continuing to give credence to the version which suggests that Isaac did suffer martyrdom. And we have already cited recorded incidents of children who suffered martyrdom at the hands of their parents, who did not wish them to be violated by the pagan tyrants.

God's command to sacrifice Isaac, and Abraham's submissive silence, may actually help us understand how a people promised greatness, wealth and innumerable progeny comparable to the stars, find the courage and the faith to endure the suffering and martyrdom mercilessly inflicted upon them by virtually every Christian or Islamic society with which they come into contact.

The paradox in Jewish history is that unless we were willing to sacrifice our children for God, we would never have survived as a God-inspired and God-committed nation with a unique message for ourselves and the world. Perhaps that is why Mount Moriah, the place of the willingness to sacrifice, is the Temple Mount of the Holy City of Jerusalem, the place from which God will ultimately be revealed to all of humanity, the place of Jewish eternity. ©2018 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the more salient lessons that we derive from this week's Torah reading regarding Abraham and Isaac is the emphasis that the Torah places on the fact that they went together to ascend to the mountain of Moriah. The hallmark of Jewish life over its long history has been the continuity and bond between generations.

Every generation differs in many aspects from the generation that preceded it. This certainly is true regarding the Jewish generations that have existed over the past few centuries. Scientific discoveries, enormous social changes, technology and communication that was previously unimaginable and an entirely different set of social and economic values

have transformed the Jewish world in a radical fashion. It is much more difficult, if not even, in some cases impossible for parents and children to walk together towards a common goal.

The secularization of much of Eastern-European Jewry during the 19th and 20th centuries is testimony to this fact. Even though different generations will always see matters in a different light there perhaps has never been such a radical and almost dysfunctional separation of generations as we undergone during this period.

It is basically true that the new generation of the 20th Century also wanted to reach and climb the mountain of Moriah, but they did not want to do so accompanied by their elders. In discarding the previous generation and its teachings and way of life, the new generation ascended many mountains, but they never climbed the right one. And much of Jewry today is stranded on strange peaks and at dangerous heights.

The challenge of the continuity of generations is an enormous one. No matter how hard each family may try, not one has a guarantee of 100% success in maintaining the great chain of Jewish tradition. In fact, in my opinion, the challenge and task of today's generation, to somehow remain connected and retain their values and purpose in life, is far greater than when I was a child.

Being able to walk together, facing the enormous challenges of modern life is a rare blessing in our time. It is not merely a matter of education and finding the right schools and raising children in a positive environment, but it is even more importantly the development of familial pride, with its warmth and love that are important and necessary to achieve the goal of generational continuity.

There is no magic bullet, or one size fits all solution to this type of challenge. There is a famous metaphor attributed to one of the great Eastern European rabbis who said that we are all but ships traversing the sea to arrive at our final destination. Every ship leaves a wake in its passing to mark where the safe passage exists. However, that wake soon disappears and every ship must make its own way across the sea of life. The same is true about binding the generations together. The attempt to do so must be constant and one should never despair. It can be achieved. ©2018 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After the binding of Yitzchak (Isaac) episode (akedat Yitzchak), the Torah tells us that Nachor, Avraham's (Abraham) brother, was blessed with

eight children. (Genesis 22:20-24) The listing of Nachor's progeny seems odd as it comes after an event of such dramatic proportions. Why the need to give us this information here?

The mainstream answer is that since Yitzchak's life has been saved, it is time for him to marry. In the end he weds Rivka (Rebecca) whose lineage is explained in the final sentences of the passage.

From here we learn an important message. Yitzchak is saved from death. But to be fully saved means not only to come out physically unscathed, but emotionally healthy as well. Displaying an ability to marry, establish a family and continue the seed of Avraham would show that Yitzchak truly survived the episode. Thus, the last sentences dealing with Yitzchak's future wife are crucial to the binding story for without marriage, Yitzchak's life would have been only partially saved.

Another thought comes to mind. The Avraham story begins and ends with the words lech lecha. (Genesis 12:1, Genesis 22:2) But, in truth, it starts a few sentences before chapter 12 with the listing of Avraham's complete family. This listing includes his brother Nachor who does not accompany Avraham to Canaan. As the Avraham story is introduced with the mentioning of Nachor, so too is it closed with the listing of Nachor's full progeny. The narrative is, therefore, presented with perfect symmetry, beginning and ending with Nachor.

Here too, another important message emerges. Often in families, we think of individuals who are more important and less important. Here the Torah states that Nachor, who at first glance seems less important, begins and ends the Avraham narrative for he plays a crucial role in the development of Avraham's future – he was, after all, the grandfather of Rivka and the great grandfather of Leah and Rachel.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik offers yet another insight. The birth of Nachor's children is recorded to contrast Avraham's and Nachor's lot in life. Avraham, the pathfinder of a new faith, the absolute believer in God, struggled to have a child with Sarah. And even after the long anticipated birth, this miracle child, Yitzchak, almost dies in the binding story. Nachor on the other hand, a man of questionable faith, is blessed with child after child. It all comes so easy to him.

Here too, there is another essential lesson to be learned. Avraham could have challenged God and argued, "why should I struggle while Nachor reaps such great reward?" Still, Avraham never doubts God, and remains a staunch believer.

I remember receiving a \$500 check to our synagogue in the fall of 1986. The writer of the letter indicated he was sending the donation in the wake of the miraculous game six victory by the N.Y. Mets over the Boston Red Sox (the famous Bill Buckner game). "This check," he wrote, "is the fulfillment of a promise I

had made at the bottom of the 10th inning with two outs and two men on. In closing, all I can say is that as a Jew and a Met fan I've learned to believe in miracles."

The young man who sent the check meant well. May he be blessed for giving so generously. But still, I couldn't help but think of the countless synagogues and churches which may have lost out when Boston fans made similar type promises if the Red Sox would win.

The test of faith is to believe in God not only when our prayers are answered, but even when they are not. ©2018 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Mei Marom

"**H**ashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamrei while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." (Bereishis 18:1) We earn our kedushah, we believe, one mitzvah at a time. Mitzvos are the way we gain significance. They are the source of and the pathway to getting close to Hashem.

As appealing as this argument is, it is dead wrong. It puts a spiritual cart before the horse. We don't have mitzvos to make us holy. Rather, because we are holy, Hashem gave us mitzvos. The kedushah of Klal Yisrael is intrinsic to it. (Tanna DeVei Eliyahu (14:23) means this when it says that Yisrael preceded Torah.)

It has to be so. Chazal (Avos 5:16) tell us that any love that is dependant upon something is impermanent. In our berachah for Torah, we praise Hashem for having chosen us from amongst all the nations of the world, and given us the Torah. If His love for us is contingent upon our observance of mitzvos, then it is not very remarkable or reliable. We must understand, therefore, that His love for us is absolute. He chose us reliably and dependably. The special quality that merited that love is the kedushah of Klal Yisrael that is hard-wired within us.

Now, this was not always the state of affairs. At one point in time, what attracted Divine love was a person's performance. Avraham's milah turned things around. That milah created within him an intrinsic kedushah that never departed from his descendants. That kedushah is the engine that drives the good that they do.

Avraham's signature midah also did a turnabout. Before the milah, his chesed was directed at those with whom he had some contact. It was opposed by the kelipah of Sedom, which argued that acts of kindness are always self-centered and self-serving: (Tikunei Zohar 30, pg. 73B) they alleviate the pain of the observer who is discomfited by the sight of the suffering of the other. After his milah, Avraham sits at the entrance of his tent, pining away because of his

inability to perform chesed. His chesed changed to become his very nature. He used to do chesed; he now became chesed. The reason for this is the same as we developed above. It is the essential, organic kedushah of Klal Yisrael that drives the mitzvos -- including milah -- and not the other way around. Milah, in fact, has a tighter fit with this core kedushah than other mitzvos do, and expresses its essence.

Many have wondered why Avraham waited for a directive from Hashem, before performing milah? He observed all the other mitzvos! The answer may be that had he done so, he would have been treating it like any other mitzvah before his transformation -- as a tool, an instrumentality in drawing closer to Hashem. In fact, milah is supposed to be an outgrowth of the essential kedushah of Jewishness.

This important distinction is enshrined in halachah. A person, according to the gemara (Nedarim 31B), who takes a vow forbidding "the circumcised" from benefitting from him intends that vow to apply to all Jews -- whether circumcised or not. Conversely, his vow against "the uncircumcised" applies to all non-Jews, whether circumcised or not. Milah reflects an inner state. The Jew has some part of that national kedushah, even if he failed to implement the external activity of the mitzvah. The non-Jew, even should he follow the procedure of milah, will not earn that essential kedushah. In order that his milah should be more than a special, meaning-laden activity, Avraham had to wait for a Divine command. That turned his milah into something that changed his penimiyus, his inner core, as well as that of all his descendants.

Ultimately, the tikkun of the entire world depends on KY rising to its intended madregah. When that happens, some of the nations of the world will accept and welcome what is happening, and others will not. Those who will subjugate themselves to the mission of Hashem's Oneness will achieve their own tikkun; those who reject it will disappear.

Avraham's milah, therefore, impacted not only upon himself and his children, but upon all other people. This is the inner meaning of his taking counsel with Aner, Eshkol and Mamre -- as representatives of all other nations. Had all three enthusiastically supported Avraham, the time of universal tikkun would have arrived. As it was, only Mamre bought in. That support brought the Shechinah to his locale. The full tikkun, however, eluded his grasp. It would have to wait for the distant future. (Based on Mei Marom, Bereishis Maamar 25) ©2018 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Two Lots

The character of Lot, Avraham's nephew, is complex and controversial. Our Rabbis have a difficult time judging whether his actions are decent or atrocious. At times he appears to be just

short of being a totally righteous man, and yet other times he appears as a totally evil individual. We have seen his inappropriate behavior in last week's parasha when his shepherds were fighting with Avraham's shepherds. We saw that he chose to live with the evil people of S'dom. Now when the angels approach S'dom to destroy the city, Lot appears as both righteous and evil at the same time.

The Torah begins, "And the two angels came to S'dom in the evening and Lot was sitting at the gates of S'dom and Lot saw and he got up to greet them and he bowed down with his face to the ground. And he said, see now, my lords, please turn to the house of your servant and stay overnight and wash your feet and rise early and you will go on your way, and they said no, but we will stay overnight in the street. And he pressed them very much they turned to him and entered his house, and he prepared a meal for them and baked cakes (matzot) and they ate."

On a positive note, the Torah tells us that "Lot was sitting at the gates of S'dom." Rashi makes note of the fact that the word *yosheiv*, sitting, is missing a letter. Rashi comments that Lot that day had been made a judge over the people of S'dom. Even though Lot was not on the same spiritual level of Avraham, he still qualifies as being righteous enough to receive this position. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch also speaks to the positive aspects of Lot's behavior using this word as an example. Hirsch explains that it was highly unusual that Lot had risen to this level of respect. The people of S'dom were noted for their lack of tolerance for strangers and here he, who was considered a stranger, was raised to a position above them. "Lot could have felt proud to be in a position today for the first time to be able to oppose the first paragraph of the laws of S'dom not to allow the practice of welcoming guests." Up to this point he had kept his ideals to himself knowing full well that his ideas were not the same as his neighbors.

Lot learned many things from Avraham but the primary lesson was welcoming guests. Lot's simple act of bowing to these strangers placed his life in jeopardy. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that the Rashbam tells us that the angels came to Avraham during the day but to Lot at night. He attributes this to the different type of test that Avraham and Lot each had to face: Avraham's test involved the preparation of food whereas Lot's test was in sheltering the angels overnight. Surely for Lot the test had to include a way for him to demonstrate his defiance of the evil practices of the people of S'dom. We know that greeting guests included three things: (1) food, (2) drink, and (3) the offer of overnight lodging. Lot offers each but falls short on the quality of each.

Lot treats these strangers with deference, calling them my masters and bowing with his face to the ground. Neither action was an acceptable practice

in S'dom. Lot assures the strangers that he has their best interest at heart and he presses them to leave the street where they might be spotted and attacked. At the same time our Rabbis indicate that there are some problems with his words. "And he said, see now, my lords, please turn to the house of your servant and stay overnight and wash your feet and rise early and you will go on your way." The Or HaChaim explains that the order of the services that Lot offered was different than the services that Avraham had offered. With Avraham, the Torah tells us that he washed the feet of his travelers before he began to serve them. He assumed that these "men" were idol worshippers like all those around him. The dust on these men's feet was something that idol worshippers often considered as part of their worship. Avraham could not permit them to join him without first washing off their sacred dust. The Or HaChaim says that this was not important to Lot who washed their feet only as a convenience. He offers them to stay overnight and then he would wash their feet in the morning. Rashi explains that Lot offered these men the normal order of sleeping first and washing in the morning. It was only Avraham who was concerned about the *avodah zara*, the idol worship. Rashi gives a second answer which makes more sense in light of the people of S'dom. Lot was worried that the people might discover the angels and kill all of them along with Lot. If the men had not yet washed their feet, Lot could claim that they had just arrived and he was in the process of kicking them out. HaRav Sorotzkin mentions that Lot only wanted to be good to these men in private so that no one should discover them. He tries to smuggle them into his house without any witnesses. His attitude changed when the people surrounded his house.

According to HaRav Sorotzkin, Lot had not intended to make a meal for the angels. At no point does Lot originally offer them a meal. Only when they were in his house did he sense the presence of Hashem. At that time, he forgot the laws of S'dom and made them a meal. Lot's wife was furious with him and she refused to help him prepare any kind of meal. The Midrash tells us that she refused to even give them salt which is why her punishment was to be buried in a salt pillar. Avraham's whole family participated in the preparation of the food for these angels whereas Lot was on his own. Lot made a *mishteh*, a feast for them. The definition of a *mishteh* is a feast in which wine is served. Lot loved wine as we see evidenced by the fact that he got drunk immediately after escaping from the overturning of S'dom. It was a result of that wine that he ended up sleeping with his own daughters.

Lot is an enigma. Every time that we begin to sense his greatness we find negative behavior that makes us question his entire character. In some ways Lot represents each of us. We are filled with both goodness and evil. Most of the time we represent the

good which is in us but we slip and fail and this causes us to doubt our view of ourselves. We must keep in mind that this is part of Man's condition. Every person has temptations and drives which he feels hard-pressed to resist. Each year we resolve to correct these faults but we fail to control most of them. Teshuvah and control only come after long battles with both wins and losses. At the same time, we must honestly assess our entire behavior, both the good and the bad. Normally we will find that our good outweighs our bad. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we are basically decent people. Just as Hashem helped Lot so does He save us from our evil surroundings and our temptations. Those who reach to Hashem for help in overcoming those temptations will find that Hashem is there to assist and aid them. We must start the process but He will guide us to our goal. May we continue to strive to improve our lives and our deeds.
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RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

"**A**nd he took cream and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and he placed [them] before them, and he was standing over them under the tree, and they ate." (Breishis 18:8) And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife, to slaughter his son. And an angel of HASHEM called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham! Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Do not stretch forth your hand to the lad, nor do the slightest thing to him, for now I know that you are a G-d fearing man, and you did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me." (Breishis 22:10-12)

Here we have on display two of the greatest of acts of Divine service by a single individual ever recorded. Avraham is remembered for all time as the exemplar of the virtue of kindness and also of a selfless devotion to HASHEM. What makes them so superlative? In each situation, one at the very beginning of the Parsha and the other at the end, Avraham had to overcome tremendous internal and external resistance.

He was sitting by the opening of the tent, an elderly man of 99 years old, recovering from the surgery of the Bris. That alone should have exempted him. HASHEM was visiting him. There can be no greater delight in the universe than that. He might wish to revel in that spiritual oasis rather than greet strangers. It was extremely hot outside. There was no reason to expect a guest, and for him the heat would also no doubt be oppressive. The guests did not yield to his initial offer to stay and eat and yet he persisted until they capitulated. WOW!

Thirty eight years later, when Yitzchok is of full stature, HASHEM would test Avraham to give up his "everything". Nobody ever had an "everything" like

Avraham had an "everything" with Yitzchok. By bringing his son as a complete sacrifice he was shredding his life work, teaching about the kindness of HASHEM. His reputation and the message of his entire life would have been ruined. It defied his deepest beliefs and his highest spiritual instinct as well. Yitzchok held the promise of the future and the generational mission to spread the word of HASHEM to the entire world. That came within a millimeter of being deleted. And of course, Yitzchok was his beloved son that he waited and prayed for, for 100 years, and now after he had sewn into his heart all of his boundless love and his wisdom, all of that would have been erased in a sweep of the knife. Yet he was willing to do this because he understood that this is what was asked of him by HASHEM. WOW x WOW!

We are still noshing on the merits of these accomplishments 3600 years later. That's how toweringly tall they were. The only problem is that in both instances, nothing happened. All that incredible display of kindness never achieved its intended goal. They were angels and their eating was a sort of playing along, but it was totally unnecessary. Angels don't need to eat. What a waste, seemingly. By the Akeida, Avraham was halted from carrying out this deed. In the end he did not do anything!

How is that an accomplishment? There was no real result? I guess we see that doing is accomplishing. Results belong to HASHEM. The Chovos HaLevavos explains in a chapter on Bitachon, why the Torah does not mention much about the "Next World" He says something very shocking. The full flavor of the Olam Haba is reserved only for Duties of the Heart. This world is the reward for the external part of the Mitzvos we do. Olam Haba, ultimate closeness to HASHEM is not a business deal or a game. It's a relationship. No number of deeds will compensate for the heart, and HASHEM wants the heart.

To illustrate this point, imagine a husband enters the house on his wife's birthday with an expensive diamond ring. Sounds good so far! He takes the ring out of the case and holds it up for her to see and then with an angry tone he tells her how much he paid for it and how much it is not worth the expense and then he throws it against the wall and shouts, "happy birthday" sarcastically before slamming the door on the way out. Is it a happy birthday? Now he did do a lot right but one thing was conspicuously absent. The heart! From Avraham, HASHEM got 100% of his heart!

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Hachnassat Orchim

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

In this week's portion we learn that "greater is the mitzvah of "Hachnasat Orchim" than greeting the holy

presence" ("Gadol hachnassat orchim mekabalat pnei schinah"). Today it is rare that one would have to make this choice. However circumstances could present themselves that one would have to forfeit the fulfilling of a Mitzva to tend to his guests. We are not referring to the simple and normal welcoming of guests, say, for a Shabbat meal. Here we are referring to a situation where people arrive at your home on Shabbat and they need a place to stay forcing you to clear out room for them, working hard so that they can eat, sleep and be comfortable.

Another dilemma that might occur, presents itself if, let's say, you are planning to attend a Shiur and suddenly these guests arrive. Do we cancel the learning of Torah for "Hachnassat Orchim?"

On the one hand we have the saying in the Talmud (Shabbat 127a) that "greater is the Mitzva of "Hachnassat Orchim "than waking in the morning to learn Torah" ("gadol Hachnassat Orchim yoter Mehashkamat Beit Hamidrash"), and yet we have the Mishna in Peah 1:1 that the learning of Torah supersedes even the Mitzvah of "Hachnaasat Orchim"! ("Talmud Torah kneged Kulam")

There are those who explain that when the Mishna is referring to the greatness of Torah when in conflict with Hachnassat Orchim, it refers to a case when there are others who are available to fulfill the mitzvah of "Hachnassat Orchim" , or perhaps the statement in Tractate Shabbat is referring only to the assembling of the Rabbis and the students, but for actual Torah learning, Torah takes precedence. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

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Last weeks parsha concluded with Avrams name being changed to Avraham. His new name represented his role as a father for the entire world. Throughout the parshios of Lech Lecha, Vayera, and Chayey Sarah that deal with the events of Avrahams lifetime, the Torah records many interactions that Avraham had with leaders and members of other nations. Avraham is accorded great respect and admiration from the leading personalities of his time. He is blessed by Malchizedek, sought after by Avimelech to enter into a treaty, and referred to as a prince of Hashem by the tribe of Efron when negotiating purchasing a burial plot for Sarah. What was it about Avraham that won him the honor and respect from his contemporaries?

Chazal comment that the title Avraham Halvri not only describes his birthplace as being ever Inahar (the other side of the river) but also refers to Avraham being distinct from the rest of humanity. His values and behavior were "on the other side of the river" from the rest of the world. Not only did Avraham not espouse the values of those around him, he challenged those who

subscribed to idolatry and those who sanctioned unethical behavior. Chazal relate to us the story that occurred during Avrahams youth when he smashed the idols that led to his fleeing from Ur Kasdim. He confronts Avimelech in Parshas Vayera and informs him that Avimelechs own servants are guilty of stealing Avrahams wells. Someone who lives up to a higher ethical and spiritual standard than others and also attempts to correct others is usually met with animosity. How did Avrahams behavior not only not earn the scorn of those around him, but also win their admiration and respect?

The secret to Avrahams success with his contemporaries was that they realized that he truly cared about them. Notwithstanding his absolute belief that idolatry had no place in the world, he cared even about the idol worshippers themselves. His tent was open to all and Chazal teach us that he treated the three angels royally even though he thought that they worshipped the sand of the desert. His care for all did not minimize his attitude towards idolatry and he insisted that they wash their feet and remove the sand before entering his tent. Once they did, he served them with love hoping to show them the proper path to avodas Hashem. The inhabitants of Sodom lived in a way that was antithetical to everything that Avraham held dear. Yet, when told of the imminent destruction that would befall them, Avraham interceded on their behalf. When one is perceived by others to be self-centered and arrogant because of ones higher spiritual standards, envy and eventually hatred of that person will result. However, if the righteous individual truly cares for others, he will not only be tolerated, but he will be respected and admired. Those around him will realize that his correcting of others does not stem from arrogance, but rather from a genuine care and concern for the welfare of all.

We often find ourselves in situations in which we have to subscribe to a higher ethical and religious standard than many of those around us. It is critical to never be aloof and uncaring, even of those whose actions and beliefs we do not approve of. We should never compromise our standards to win the favor of others, rather we should relate to others in a kind and caring manner. By bringing honor and respect to our values and actions, we are truly magnifying the honor and respect of Hashem Who expects us to live a life of emulating the values and actions of Avraham

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