

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

I have written about the binding of Isaac many times in these studies, each time proposing an interpretation somewhat different from the ones given by the classic commentators. I do so for a simple reason.

The Torah, and Tanach generally, regard child sacrifice as one of the worst of evils. Child sacrifice was widely practised in the ancient world. In 2 Kings 3:26-27, we read of how the Moabite king Mesha, in the course of war against Israel, Judah and Edom, sacrificed his eldest son to the god Chemosh. Had the point of the trial been Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, then in terms of the value system of Tanach itself he would have proven himself no better than a pagan king.

Besides this, the name Abram means "mighty father." The change of name to Abraham was meant to signify "father of many nations." God said that He chose Abram "so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to go in the way of the Lord," meaning that Abraham was chosen to be a role model of fatherhood. A model father does not sacrifice his child.

The classic interpretation given by most of the commentators is beautiful and moving. Abraham showed that he loved God more than he loved his own son. But for the reasons above, I prefer to continue to search for different interpretations. Unquestionably, there was a trial. It involved Isaac. It tested Abraham's faith to the limit. But it was about something else.

One of the most perplexing features of the Abraham story is the disconnect between God's promises and the reality. Seven times, God promised Abraham the land. Yet when Sarah died, he owned not even a burial plot and had to buy one at an exorbitant price.

At the very opening of the story (see parshat Lech Lecha), God called on him to leave his land, his

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in memory of our beloved mother  
Chana Rosenberg A"H  
on her eighth yartzeit  
חנה בת יוסף ע"ה  
נפטרה כ"ג מר חשון תשע"ב  
by Itzy and Ruchie Weisberg

birthplace and his father's house, and promised him, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you." Without demur or hesitation, Abraham left, began the journey, and arrived in the land of Canaan. He came to Shechem and built an altar there. He moved on to Bet-El and built an altar there as well. Then almost immediately we read that "There was a famine in the land."

Abraham and his household were forced to go to Egypt. There, he found that his life was at risk. He asked Sarah to pretend to be his sister rather than his wife, thus putting her in a false position, (conduct which Ramban intensely criticised). Where, at that moment, was the Divine blessing? How was it that, leaving his land and following God's call, Abraham found himself in a morally dangerous situation where he was forced to choose between asking his wife to live a lie, and exposing himself to the probability, perhaps certainty, of his own death?

A pattern is beginning to emerge. Abraham was learning that there is a long and winding road between promise and fulfilment. Not because God does not keep His word, but because Abraham and his descendants were charged with bringing something new into the world. A sacred society. A nation formed by covenant. An abandonment of idolatry. An austere code of conduct. A more intimate relationship with God than any people has ever known. It would become a nation of pioneers. And God was teaching Abraham from the very beginning that this demands extraordinary strengths of character, because nothing great and transformative happens overnight in the human world. You have to keep going, even if you are tired and lost, exhausted and despondent.

God will bring about everything He promised. But not immediately. And not directly. God seeks change in the real world of everyday lives. And He seeks those who have the tenacity of faith to keep going despite all the setbacks. That is what the life of Abraham was about.

Nowhere was this clearer than in relation to God's promise of children. Four times, God spoke about this to Abraham: 1. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you." (Gen. 12:2)

2. "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted." (Gen. 13:16)



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3. "Look up at the sky and count the stars -- if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (Gen. 15:5)

4. "No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you." (Gen. 17:5-6)

Four ascending promises: a great nation, as many as the dust of the earth, as the stars of the sky; not one nation but many nations. Abraham heard these promises and had faith in them: "Abram believed the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

Then God gave Abraham some painful news. His son by Hagar, Ishmael, would not be his spiritual heir. God would bless him and make him a great nation, "But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year." (Gen. 17:21).

It is against this background of four promises of countless children, and a further promise that Abraham's covenant would be continued by Isaac, that we must set the chilling words that open the trial: "Take your son, your only son, the son that you love -- Isaac -- and offer him up."

The trial was not to see whether Abraham had the courage to sacrifice his son. As we saw above, even pagans like Mesha king of Moab had that courage. It was widespread in the ancient world, and completely abhorrent to Judaism.

The trial was not to see whether Abraham had the strength to give up something he loved. He had shown this time and time again. At the very beginning of his story he gave up his land, his birthplace and his father's house, everything that was familiar to him, everything that spoke of home. In the previous chapter, he gave up his firstborn son Ishmael whom, it is clear, he also loved. Was there even the slightest doubt that he would give up Isaac, who was so clearly God's miraculous gift, arriving when Sarah was already postmenopausal?

The trial was to see whether Abraham could live with what seemed to be a clear contradiction between God's word now, and God's word on five previous occasions, promising him children and a

covenant that would be continued by Isaac.

The Rabbis knew that there were instances where two verses contradicted one another until a third verse came to resolve the contradiction. That was Abraham's situation. He was faced with a contradiction, and there was as yet no further verse to resolve it. That was the test. Could Abraham live with uncertainty?

He did just that. He prepared himself for the sacrifice. But he told no one else. When he and Isaac set off on the third day on their own, he told the two servants who had accompanied them, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." When Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham replied, "God Himself will provide the lamb."

These statements are usually taken as diplomatic evasions. I believe, however, that Abraham meant exactly what he said. He was living the contradiction. He knew God had told him to sacrifice his son, but he also knew that God had told him that He would establish an everlasting covenant with his son.

The trial of the binding of Isaac was not about sacrifice but about uncertainty. Until it was over, Abraham did not know what to believe, or how it would end. He believed that the God who promised him a son would not allow him to sacrifice that son. But he did not know how the contradiction between God's promise and His command would resolve itself.

The poet John Keats, in a letter to his brothers George and Thomas in 1817, sought to define what made Shakespeare so great compared to other writers. He possessed, he said, "Negative Capability -- that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." Shakespeare, in other words, was open to life in all its multiplicity and complexity, its conflicts and contradictions, while other, lesser writers sought to reduce it to a single philosophical frame. What Shakespeare was to literature, Abraham was to faith.

I believe that Abraham taught us that faith is not certainty; it is the courage to live with uncertainty. He had negative capability. He knew the promises would come true; he could live with the uncertainty of not knowing how or when. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

One of the most difficult stories of the Bible – and certainly the complex highlight of Vayera – is the "binding" (and near slaughter) of Isaac, but the tale preceding it may legitimately be called the "binding" (near death) of Ishmael. This occurred when Abram

(Abraham), acting on the commandment of God, banishes his eldest son, but without providing him and his mother with enough supplies to survive a desert journey. And perhaps, when the Bible introduces the story of the binding of Isaac with the words, “And it happened after these things... which preceded and even caused the (near) sacrifice”) of Isaac refers to Abraham’s harsh treatment of Ishmael. God is saying, in effect, that if Abraham could send Hagar and Ishmael into the desert with only bread and a jug of water, then God will now make Abraham take Isaac to Mount Moriah ostensibly to watch him die.

There seem to be many biblical parallels between the two stories that give credence to this “measure-for-measure” interpretation. In both stories it is God who commands the near sacrifice; in both stories it is an “angel of God” who saves the young men, both of whom are referred to as “na’ar” (youth) rather than “son” in the context of the *deus ex machina* (Gen. 21:17; 22:11, 12); and in both instances the son in question does not return to live with his father.

However, upon further reflection it seems to me that the akeda story – clearly an important test for Abraham in its own right – cannot be taken as a mere reaction to Abraham’s “niggardly” treatment of Hagar and Ishmael; moreover, Abraham sends his son and mistress away only in acquiescence to God’s command that he listen to Sarah, with the Bible expressly stating that “the matter [of the banishment] was very grievous” in his eyes (21:10-12). Abraham only agrees after hearing God’s promise that “I shall also make the son of this maidservant a nation, because he [too] is of your seed” (21:13).

Hence I believe that Abraham did give them sufficient supplies, but Hagar got lost in the desert. The point of the biblical narratives – and the parallels between them – is not “measure-for-measure punishment,” but to stress the fact that Ishmael is also a son of Abraham, that he too will become a great nation, and that the destinies of both will always be intertwined. Indeed, because Ishmael has been so significantly blessed by God, Isaac seems to be almost obsessed with him – or at least with the place where God promised greatness to Hagar’s son – and this obsession haunts him for life.

You will remember that when Hagar first becomes pregnant and Sarai (Sarah) is still barren, Hagar behaves superciliously toward her. In response, Sarai treats Hagar as a handmaiden again (rather than as an equal wife, as the Code of Hammurabi ordains), and she flees. An angel of the Lord finds her, exhorts her to return to Sarai as a handmaiden, and then grants the following blessing: “I shall increase, yes, increase your seed, and they shall not be able to be counted because they are so numerous... and behold you are pregnant and shall bear a son. Call his name Ishmael, for the Lord has heard your affliction [at the hands of

Sarai].

He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand over everything and everyone’s hand against him; and in the face of all his brethren shall he dwell” (16:9-11).

This blessing of Hagar’s seed parallels the blessing that God had just given to Abraham’s seed: “Look now heavenwards and count the stars; you cannot count them; so shall be your seed” (15:5). And when, in the next chapter, God changes Abram’s name to Abraham, reflecting his destiny to be the father of a multitude of nations, Isaac will wonder whether the main heir to the Abrahamic patrimony is Ishmael, Abraham’s firstborn! The place where God bestows this Abrahamic blessing on Hagar’s seed is a well between Kadesh and Bered which Hagar names “the well for the Living God who looked after me,” Beer-lahai-roi (16:13, 14). And even though later on, when Abraham is told by God to banish Hagar and Ishmael because Ishmael is “mocking” around Isaac, God promises Abraham that “through Isaac shall be called your [covenantal] seed” (21:12).

Yet God still saves Ishmael’s life and guarantees that He will make from him “a great nation” (21:18).

Hence Isaac spends his life both attracted to the more aggressive firstborn Ishmael, who will also father a great nation, and jealous of the brother who may well have been his father’s favorite – after all, when God informs the 99-year-old Abraham that his 89-year-old wife would become pregnant, the patriarch responds: “Would that Ishmael may live before thee!” (17:18). Isaac is, after all, rather meek – witness how reluctant he is to get into any kind of battle with Abimelech, even though the king of Gerar has reneged on a contract – and he may well fear that Abraham favors the more aggressive Ishmael. He may even have suspected that his father wanted to see him dead at the akeda to clear the way for Ishmael, and therefore doesn’t return with his father to Beersheba afterward; we only find Isaac with Abraham at the end of Abraham’s life. Isaac is jealous, but is also guilt-ridden.

Ishmael is after all the firstborn, who is banished and whose mother is banished because of him. And Isaac is also filled with feelings of unworthiness because of his lack of self-assertiveness.

And so Isaac, due to his conflicted relationship with Ishmael, is described as going back and forth from Beer-lahai-roi (“bo mibo” – literally coming from coming, Gen. 24:62, 63), which is where Eliezer finds him when he presents Rebecca. And Rashi even suggests that Isaac returns to Beer-lahai-roi to bring Hagar as a new wife for Abraham after Sarah’s death; Isaac serves as *shadchan* (“matchmaker”), since he feels guilty about Ishmael and Hagar’s banishment. And Abraham is buried by “Isaac and Ishmael his sons” – the Midrash says that Ishmael returned and repented – after which “Isaac dwelt in Beer-lahai-roi” (25:8-11).

The chapter concludes with the 12 “princes of nations” born to Ishmael, paralleling Isaac’s 12 grandsons and tribes. Ishmael and Isaac are involved in a kind of perpetual approach-avoidance dance wherein they see each other as rivals but come to recognize that they must learn to live together in the same part of the world, where each will develop into a great nation.

Abraham is indeed the father of a multitude of nations. ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he Mishnah in Avot specifically, and Jewish tradition generally, instructs us that our father Abraham was constantly challenged with great tests in life and was able to survive and surmount all of them. There is an underlying difficulty to this narrative regarding the testing of Abraham. God after all is omniscient and knows well in advance what the reaction of Abraham will be to all the challenges that are placed before him. This being the case, then one can easily ask why bother presenting those challenges in the first place.

This fits in to the general question that Maimonides deals with when he attempts to reconcile God’s omniscience with the presence of human free will and free choice. His answer is that both exist and coexist and that is part of the secret of the fact that human beings and human logic can never truly understand the Infinite and the Eternal. So that is undoubtedly true in the case of Abraham and his challenges.

Even though ultimately we will be unable to arrive at a definitive answer to this question – almost all questions that begin with the word ‘why’ are never completely satisfactorily answered – nevertheless I believe that we can attempt to arrive at some sort of understanding as to the purpose of the tests that Abraham endured and overcame. The Torah would not have devoted so much space and such detailed descriptions to these events in the life of Abraham if there wouldn’t be eternal moral teachings present in the narrative that are relevant and true to all humans in all generations.

I think the obvious answer that jumps forth from the pages is that the tests are not meant to prove anything to Heaven as much as they are meant to prove the potential of greatness of Abraham to Abraham himself. It is our nature not to realize how great our potential is, how strong we really are, morally and emotionally, and to our surprise what we are capable of accomplishing.

It is one thing to profess that one has faith and is willing to make sacrifices on behalf of the preservation of that faith, whether personal or national. However, it is another thing completely to make those

sacrifices, and to experience the emotional difficulties and even tragedies that life often visits upon us. A person never really knows what one’s true makeup is unless tested over a lifetime, with the Talmud’s graphic phrase that we are ultimately tested regarding our final resting place.

Abraham becomes great and stands erect after having successfully dealt with the challenges to his faith and to his vision that life and the environment in which he lived set before him. That is perhaps what the Torah indicates to us when it says that Abraham’s faith was of such power in nature that the Lord deemed it to be the paragon of righteousness. Righteousness is achieved only when challenges are overcome. ©2019 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**his week’s portion (Vayera) parallels last week’s (Lekh Lekha) with one significant exception. Lekh Lekha is nationalistic, while this week’s portion is universalistic.

Both portions deal with Avraham (Abraham) as savior of Sodom. In Lekh Lekha, the focus is on family, as Avraham saves his nephew Lot who had moved to Sodom. (Genesis, Chapter 14) In Vayera, Avraham tries to save the entire city filled with non-Jews. (Chapters 18,19)

Both portions deal with Sarah’s declaring that she is Avraham’s sister. In Lekh Lekha that declaration is followed by their eviction from Egypt. (Ch. 12) In Vayera the declaration is followed by Avraham understanding that he is part of a larger world. He thus enters into a covenantal agreement with Avimelekh, King of Philistia. (Chapter 20, 21)

Both portions deal with the expulsion of Hagar, Avraham’s second wife. In Lekh Lekha Avraham does not object. (Ch. 16) In Va-yera he is reluctant to have Hagar cast out. In the end, Avraham is thereby protective of the forerunners of Islam, Hagar and their son Yishmael.

Both portions deal with God’s promises to Avraham. In Lekh Lekha, God makes a covenant exclusively with Avraham – promising him land and children. (Chs. 12, 15, 17) In Vayera, God eternally connects with Avraham through the binding of Isaac. Still, whereas Avraham is described as walking together (yahdav) with Yitzchak (Isaac) to Moriah (Ch. 22:6), Avraham returns home together (yahdav) with his lads -- Yishmael and Eliezer, non-Jews. (Ch. 22:19)

It can be suggested that Avraham in Vayera had become so universal that he forgot his national roots. The corrective to Avraham’s universal leaning is next week’s portion of Hayei Sarah. Note that in Hayei

Sarah, Avraham acquires part of the land of Israel and finds a wife for his son—both minding the home front and echoing the nationalistic themes of Lekh Lekha. (Chs. 23, 24)

One of the beauties of our tradition is that Judaism has nationalistic as well as universalistic dimensions. The way that we care for our own informs us how to treat the larger world. Indeed, the test of the way we love the world is how we show love toward our own brother or sister, our fellow Jew.

The flow of the Avraham / Sarah narrative indicates that one should realize that both elements are critical, yet one should make sure that when embracing the importance of universalism, that it not be at the expense of one's inner circle, family or nation. ©2019 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

**"B**ehold the nearby city to run to... let me flee there for it is small and my life will be saved." (Beraishis 19:20) When the angels came to rescue Lot from Sodom before the city was overturned, he was hesitant to leave. He pointed out that one of the five cities in the area, Tzoar, was smaller and could thus be "overlooked" and allowed to remain for him to flee to. The angel agreed but in the end Lot fled to the mountains instead.

The reasoning that the city could be saved was that as it was built after Sodom, it had not reached its quota of evil since it was "younger." Further, it was a small town so there would be fewer sins. Interestingly, the Netziv points out that small town people live more simply and are not involved in the various pleasures and desires that city people are!

If this reasoning worked, why did Avraham not use it in his negotiations with Hashem? He was asking that a certain number of righteous people should save all five cities. Why not at least try to save this one by itself?

The Ohr HaChaim discusses how the argument worked to begin with. If they were wicked enough to be killed, then Lot's request shouldn't matter. If not, it shouldn't be necessary. He explains that Hashem had given the angel permission to destroy because they did deserve it, but Lot wisely convinced the angel not to do so since it was now his choice whether to destroy or not. Because Avraham was talking to Hashem about whether that permission would be given or not, he didn't make that argument.

We can also explain that Avraham didn't argue that the city should be saved because he was aware of the rule, "Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbor." Simply being a part of the "neighborhood" with Sodom

doomed Tzoar. That may be why Avraham didn't try to save Lot from Sodom even though he saved him from capture. Since Lot chose to live there he effectively sealed his own fate – or so Avraham thought.

When the angels arrived to save him (out of respect for Avraham) Lot realized that though the rule of association with the wicked existed, it could be overridden. He therefore asked that this city which had not reached its quota of wickedness be spared from sharing the fate of its neighbors though it normally would have been drawn into their punishment.

This teaches us how far Hashem's mercy goes in that He allows for us to have "exceptions" to the rules, as long as we ask with sincerity and understand that He does this for us because He wants to give us a chance to turn things around.

A villager made his first ever trip to the big city. He was amazed by the sights and sounds. The sensory overload was like nothing he had ever experienced in his life. Suddenly he found himself facing the storefront of the King's tailor. He was amazed by the rolls of exquisite fabric and the artistic colorful patterns. As he stood admiring, the tailor took a roll of material and spread it out on his work table. He took a pair of scissors and was about to begin cutting. The villager could not control himself and he burst into the store and forcibly stopped the tailor from cutting the material. "How can you destroy such a magnificent piece of fabric?" screamed the villager.

"Fool", said the tailor. "Now it is just a useless piece of fabric. When I finish cutting it, the King will grace himself with it at his next banquet."

Sometimes when we see a great Tzaddik suffering, says the Dubno Magid, we question how can Hashem make such a special human being suffer? This is a question of someone who doesn't understand anything. If only we understood that Hashem is shaping him into something far beyond the beauty he already possesses, we wouldn't question it at all. ©2019 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## 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 DAVID S. LEVIN**

### **Why is Lot Saved?**

**M**uch of the first half of this week's parasha is devoted to the three angels who appear to Avraham. These angels have three tasks: (1) visit Avraham to assist his recovery from the circumcision, (2) tell Avraham and Sarah that they would have son in a year, and (3) destroy Sodom and the other four cities of the area. Our Rabbis expand these tasks to include saving Avraham's nephew, Lot, and include that responsibility within the first task of assisting Avraham's recovery. We see that Avraham argues on behalf of the people of Sodom but they are beyond help. Hashem destroys the entire area but saves Lot from destruction.

The story of the test of Sodom and Lot's escape with his family takes place in Chapter 19, 1-26. What follows are three p'sukim which seem somewhat cryptic: "Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem. And he gazed down upon Sodom and Gomorah and the entire surface of the land of the plain, and saw, and behold, the smoke of the earth rose like the smoke of a kiln. And so it was when Elokim destroyed the cities of the plain that Elokim remembered Avraham, so He sent Lot from amidst the upheaval when He overturned the cities in which Lot lived." There are several problems with these sentences. Is this a reiteration of the previously told story and is it to give us some new insight to Lot and Avraham? And what is implied from the statement, "Elokim remembered Avraham, so He sent Lot from amidst the upheaval...?"

There are two basic approaches to this last statement. One approach is taken by Rashi who quotes

a Midrash which indicates that Lot was being rewarded for an incident involving Avraham. In last week's parasha we saw that a famine caused Avraham to bring his family down to Egypt. Avraham was worried that the Egyptians would see how beautiful Sarah was and kill him in order to make her available to Par'oh. He asked Sarah to say that she was his sister (relative, but not wife) which would work in his benefit and allow him to survive. Lot was with them, heard the misleading remark, and did not endanger Avraham by clarifying the truth. Hashem remembered what Lot did for Avraham, so He saved Lot. This indicates that Lot deserved to be saved. Still we could question why the Torah mentions Avraham when we have just witnessed that Lot saved the two angels from the people of Sodom. Surely that should have merited his being saved without remembering this incident with Avraham. One explanation of this problem could be that since the Torah was discussing Avraham as he viewed the destruction, it wanted to continue by associating Avraham with Lot's meritorious acts.

The Ramban also indicates that Lot deserved to be saved because he was willing to travel to Canaan with Avraham and roam the land. The Ramban even attributes Lot's living in Sodom as a choice he made against his will. He did not wish to separate from Avraham, but at Avraham's request, he moved his tents and animals and servants and went to live in a place that was not as safe and wholesome as if he had remained with Avraham.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin offers several different explanations that present our sentence from a different angle, namely, that Lot did not deserve to be saved by any of his actions. We must remember that Lot chose to live among the people of Sodom and did not appear to be bothered by their wickedness. We also see that Lot was willing to sacrifice his own daughters while he was saving the angels. His conflicted behavior may have destroyed any merit that he had on his own. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that a father cannot save his son and all-the-more-so his nephew. Lot would have received the same punishment as the people of Sodom had it not been for the suffering that Avraham would have endured had this happened. This was previously indicated by the danger which Avraham willingly faced in order to save Lot from the Four Kings. In an additional explanation of "remembered Avraham," HaRav Sorotzkin reminds us that Hashem promised to save the Tzaddikim (righteous men) in Sodom when Avraham argued with Him to save the entire five cities of the plain. Even though Lot was not a complete tzaddik, we can qualify him by comparing his actions to the others who lived there. Lot had within his power to do evil but refrained from doing so. The simple fact that he refrained from evil though he did not do righteous acts, indicated that he was on a higher level than the Sodomites. Not to be

totally negative, HaRav Sorotzkin does credit Lot with actively welcoming the angels and providing them with protection. Still he credits Avraham in that Lot only learned these traits from Avraham's house.

For another approach entirely, we turn to the Rambam (Maimonides). The Rambam explains that all mention of angels in the Torah are a sign of prophecy. Prophecy also takes place in a dream or vision for all prophets except Moshe. Therefore, the beginning of our parasha with the approaching of three angels must have been a prophecy for Avraham during sleep. The question we must ask is at what point this vision ends. According to some of the meforshim on the Rambam, the vision only ends where Avraham awakens (our quotation). The message from the angels to Sarah, the argument with Hashem over saving the people of Sodom, and Lot's protection and saving of the angels are all part of this vision and did not actually take place other than through prophecy. This eliminates our question about whether our quotation was a reiteration of the previous story, as that never really took place. Avraham dreamed the entire destruction and could not ascertain whether his dream was a prophecy until he looked out on the plain of the Jordan. In the Rambam's view, it is also clear that our focus on Lot's good deeds must be limited to the incident with Avraham rather than a reward for his treatment of the angels, as that was a dream.

Our Rabbis tell us that there are shiv'im panim l'Torah, seventy faces to the Torah. There are many different approaches that one must take when studying the Torah. At different times in our lives, one approach may be more meaningful than others, yet the next year might prove a different approach more meaningful. This concept is not only for Torah study but also for our own lives. We sometimes face a dilemma which leaves us feeling helpless. We feel that we have exhausted our options yet can find no solution. We must then try an entirely different perspective much as we examine the Torah each year from a different perspective. And just as we discuss our different perspective in Torah with a partner, it is beneficial to discuss our new approach to our dilemma with someone else who can listen and help. May our study of Torah always guide us to be able to face our problems at hand. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

### **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**A**vraham invites three visitors to stay for a meal with the words, "I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may sustain yourselves, then go on." Yet, Avraham does not give them just a crust of bread, he serves them a lavish multi-course feast. Why does Avraham use such a humble invitation? Wouldn't a more descriptive invitation have been more enticing?

In the Talmud (Bava Metzia 87a) the Sages

derive from here the principle that the righteous say little and do much. The wicked, however, say much and do little (as we see next week with Efron's false assurances to Avraham when Avraham wants to bury his wife, Sarah).

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz, of the Mir Yeshiva, comments that talking about what you plan to do is negative. It is superfluous and often counterproductive. Talking is easier than doing. It creates expectations. And then, even with the greatest of intent, things happen which prevent doing. There is pleasure in talking about the good you intend to do, but it is a cheap way of getting honor and approval. Talking changes the focus from doing good for its own sake to doing good for the sake of approval -- and there are those who make grandiose promises and then they forget... causing great heartache and pain. *Dvar Torah Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz*

#### **RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

### **Legacy**

**I**t is a blistering hot day. Abraham, that paragon of hospitality, is sitting by the door anxiously looking for passersby that he can invite into his home. Suddenly, he sees three dust-covered desert nomads trudging down the road. Before he brings them into his house, Abraham asks them to wash their feet, because he suspects they might be pagans who worship the dust of their feet. Then he feeds them lavishly.

Before they leave, the travelers, really angels in disguise, inform Abraham that Sarah would give birth in a year. Sarah overhears and bursts into laughter. After all, Abraham is one hundred years and she herself is a sprightly ninety, not exactly the height of the child-bearing years.

The Almighty, however, does not consider the situation humorous. He asks Abraham why Sarah found this a laughing matter, and Abraham, in turn, rebukes Sarah for laughing.

Let us consider for a moment. What had Sarah done wrong? After all, she did not know that the dusty wayfarers were really angels. Why then should she have thought that their blessings were efficacious? Can she be blamed for finding the fanciful good wishes of these wayfarers laughable?

The commentators explain that Sarah might indeed not have known that the wayfarers blessing her were angels, and this was exactly the reason she deserved to be reprimanded. She saw before her people who dressed differently, spoke differently, thought differently, and therefore, she looked down on them. She did not consider the blessings of such people worthwhile.

But how could she judge who is worthy and who is not? How could she know what lay within the hearts and souls of other people? How could she

determine their inner value?

This was the reason Sarah was reprimanded. She took one look at these dusty wayfarers and instantly jumped to the conclusion that they were worthless people whose blessings were equally worthless.

A young man approached the stately house and knocked on the door. There was no response. He knocked again. Still no response.

Suddenly, he heard a hoarse voice speak. "What are you doing here, young fellow?"

He turned and saw an old man dressed in tramp's rags sitting on the ground, his back against the wall. He had not noticed him before.

"I've come to see the great sage, old man," the young man replied. "I want to become his disciple and learn from his knowledge and wisdom."

"Hah!" said the tramp. "He doesn't have so much knowledge, and he has even less wisdom."

"How dare you?" the young man replied in a flash of anger. "What does a person like you know about knowledge and wisdom?" He turned back to the door and resumed knocking. Still no response.

The following day, the young man returned. His knock was answered by a servant who showed him into the presence of the sage. Amazingly, the sage seemed to be the identical twin of the beggar.

"You recognize me, don't you?" said the sage, "I was the man sitting on the ground. I am afraid I can not accept you as my disciple."

"But why?" the young man asked plaintively. "How was I to know it was really you?"

"You saw a man," said the sage, "and based on his outward appearance you decided that he could now nothing about knowledge or wisdom. You can never be a disciple of mine."

In our own lives, we are called upon to make value judgments about other people all the time. Whether it is in a business, social or any other setting, we tend to jump to conclusions about new people. We rely on first impressions. We look at their clothing, their accessories, their bearing, their air of sophistication or lack of it, and we make assumptions about their intelligence, character, talents and social standing. First impressions are certainly important, and we should always try to make a good first impression on others. Nonetheless, it is unfair to pigeonhole and stereotype people on the basis of external appearance. Appearances can be deceiving, and we could be missing out on some very fine blessings. © 2019 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

**ZEV S. ITZKOWITZ**

## A Byte of Torah

“Sarah saw that the son who Hagar the Egyptian had born to Abraham, was laughing. She said to Abraham, Send away this slave together

with her son. The son of this slave will not share the inheritance with my son Isaac.” (Genesis 21:9-10)

What was it about Ishmael's "laughing" that concerned Sarah? Ishmael had immersed himself in strange and evil practices. Yet, he claimed that since he was the firstborn, he should still receive the double inheritance portion that is the firstborn's privilege (see also Duet. 21:17). He even physically threatened Isaac with this claim. Sarah, then ordered Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael, for Ishmael showed that he was not worthy of inheriting anything from Abraham (Rashi).

Another possibility is that the word "laughing" refers to the normal taunts, teases and toughness that young boys often exhibit to one another (Ibn Ezra). Isaac, however, was a very young boy and could not readily defend himself from the taunting behavior of his older brother. Sarah, witnessed this outrageous behavior, became furious, and ordered Abraham to send them away (Chizkuni).

Alternatively, Ishmael was belittling Isaac's lineage. His claim was that only he was the true heir of Abraham, whereas Isaac's true father was Abimelekh, King of Gerar. Since children often repeat what they hear at home, Sarah knew that this scoffing was instigated by Hagar (who had previously treated her with contempt, see Gen. 16:4) and, thus, ordered both Hagar and her son, Ishmael, expelled from Abraham's home (HaKesav VeHakabalah). © 1995 Z. Itzkowitz

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

As Parshat Vayeira clearly demonstrates, one of Avraham's most beautiful qualities was his kindness to others. This is demonstrated when his three guests came to visit: Almost everything was done with excitement, enthusiasm, and in excess, solely for the benefit of his guests. The only exception was that when Avraham offered the men water, he specified getting them "a little" water. Why did Avraham suddenly seem to get stingy?

The Lekach Tov explains that this act shows Avraham's sensitivity to others even MORE because water was the only item that Avraham didn't have time to fetch himself. Avraham's thinking was that if he was going to trouble his servants to get the water, he had no right to ask them to bring more water than is actually needed. It was Avraham's sensitivity to his staff that compelled him to only offer a small quantity of water to his guests. We, too, need to be mindful of the needs of those around us, especially our family and friends, and take no one for granted. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

