

Abraham I and Abraham II

- When I was a kid I used to love to read about superheros. Every good superhero story can really be summed up in one line: An unassuming leader emerges on the scene, he or she is faced with a difficult conflict, the hero is victorious, and the curtain closes with everyone living happily ever after.
- Last week's parsha read like one of these classic stories. After facing a number of minor tests, Avraham is tasked with his most difficult test yet where he is asked to slaughter his beloved son. Avraham ascends the mountain, grasps the knife in his hands. If we add in the special effects of Chazal, this climactic scene is even more pronounced. The heavens were ripped open above Avraham and all the heavenly angels peered down to Earth to see if Avraham would pass this daunting task. It was quite literally one of the most inspiring and momentous occasions in the history of the universe!
- After such a climax, after such a high, we would have expected the story to have ended, like all hero stories do, with all the characters living happily ever after. However, this week's parsha picks up right where last week's parsha ends and deals with what seems to be the minutiae of mundane life! After all the lights and sounds we read a whole parsha about things that everyone must deal with. In the beginning of the parsha we learn about Sarah's death and Avraham's subsequent search for a burial plot for her. And the rest of

the parsha talks about Avraham sending his servant Eliezer to find his son a wife.

- There is nothing particularly heroic about burying one's wife- It is something that many people must unfortunately do! And there is nothing extraordinary about finding a shidduch for your son! It is an obligation that every person has for their child! To make matters more strange, the Torah which usually doesn't like to mince words, tells the whole story of Eliezer finding a wife for Yitzchak, not once but twice! Why do we need 83 whole pesukim telling us such anticlimactic events? Shouldn't the Torah have ended with the story of the Akeidah, clearly Avraham's most significant moment in his life?
- In order to understand the answer to these questions I would like to share with you an insight that The New York Times columnist David Brooks makes. In his book "The Road to Character" Brooks distinguishes between two types of virtues a person must strive for. On the one hand there is what he calls "resume virtues," which are all about the impressive accomplishments one does in his lifetime. Quite simply, they are the bottom line major headlines you would put on your resume. On the other hand, we have "eulogy virtues" which are the character traits which we'd like to be remembered by.

- Most of us spend a majority of our lifetime trying to improve our “resume virtues”. We try to make a lot of money, try to land more prestigious jobs, acquire fancy possessions etc. Included in “resume virtues” are also things of more inherent value such as giving charity, bikur cholim, and spending time with friends. What unites “resume virtues” is that they are focused on a person’s relationship with the outside world.
- What often doesn’t get as much attention are the “eulogy virtues”. Eulogy virtues are the virtues we exhibit within our own homes and families. Our relationship with our families is almost always *desired*, yet all too often aren’t actively worked on. Many people *desire* to be close with their children, but it’s very hard to actually take the time out of one’s busy schedule to sit down and do homework with them or to just shmooze with them. Many people *desire* to have a closer relationship with their spouse but find themselves too busy to take a few minutes out of every day to just be solely with them. “Eulogy virtues” are about acting for our families and being with our families. And when we are with our families, it is about being totally present and mindful when we are physically there.
- I think this is the message the Torah is trying to teach us. Up until now we have encountered Avraham who definitely has a lot to put on his “resume virtue” list. Afterall, we know Avraham as the hero who courageously jumped into a fiery furnace, who fearlessly went to war in order to save his relative, who valiantly attempted to save whole cities through

his prayer, and who astonishingly was willing to slaughter his own son! He is a hero par excellence who was known throughout the world. But did his family really know him?

- Many of you may be familiar with Rabbi Soloveichik's reading of the first two chapters of Bereishis where he distinguishes between Adam I, the subject of the first chapter of Bereishis, and Adam II, the subject of the second chapter. Well I think there is also Avraham I and Avraham II. The Avraham we learned about before parshas chayei sarah, the Avraham who built up an impressive resume, as Avraham I.
- However, if the story would have ended in parshas VaYera we would not have learned the true greatness of Avraham. If he remained on top of the mountain and never came down, both literally and figuratively, we would never know that not only did Avraham succeed in accomplishing his "resume virtues," but he was also successful and accomplishing his "eulogy virtues." In this week's parsha we learn about Avraham II. Avraham II is the part of Avraham that, as great as he was and as much as he already accomplished in the outer world, also took the time to focus and take care of his family. He took burying his wife and finding a wife for his son as seriously as everything else he had accomplished until this point. To emphasize the importance of this task the Torah even repeats it. Perhaps Avraham's greatest test, was to see if he would transition from Avraham I and become Avraham II.

- Contrary to popular belief, it's actually easier to accomplish the “resume virtues” than the “eulogy virtues.” When it comes to “resume virtues” we know we have to work hard to achieve them so we do what it takes to reach those goals. For “Eulogy virtues,” however, we generally assume those will come by themselves and therefore we don’t actively work on them. Sometimes they are neglected until it is too late. Too often, they are neglected until it’s too late.
- **The task of each in everyone of us is to try to find the proper balance between the Avraham I and Avraham II within us.**
- Brian Dyson, the former CEO and COO of Coke Cola, once gave a mashal to help us focus on maintaining balance. He said:
“Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them work, family, health, friends and spirit. And you’re keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls – family, health, friends and spirit – are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life.”
- The glass ball of family is the ingredient that make up Avraham II. It is the trait that will be talked about more at our funerals than our resume virtues will be.

- Around 70 years ago the chevra kadisha in Yerushalayim decided to make a special row of burial plots in the cemetery in Sanhedria reserved specifically for roshei yeshiva and gedolei hador. Many great rabanim were buried there and remain there to this day. However when Rav Aryeh Levine, known as the Tzadik of Yerushalayim, heard about this he took a trip to the head of the chevra kadisha and said, *“ After 120 years please don't bury me in Rabbi Row in the cemetery. I want to be buried next to my wife, aleha hashalom. What was good for Avraham Avinu to be buried next to Sara Imeinu is good enough for me!”*
- Rav Aryeh Levine, despite being one of the greatest Rabbis of his generation, knew that what's more important than his great resume virtues were his eulogy virtues. He realized that his relationship with his wife and family is what defined him more than all his other accolades and that is why he wished to be buried next to his wife.
- Let us follow the model of Rav Aryeh Levine. Let us remember to work on our eulogy virtues and not just our resume virtues. Let us remember to juggle our glass balls and prevent them from falling. And let us develop our inner Avraham II and not just our Avraham I.

Good Shabbos