



# Parshas Vayeira

# פרשת וירא

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## Do As I Say And As I Do

*Yitzchak Hagler ('22)*

Judaism is hard. Not only is it hard to perform the many, many *mitzvos*, some of which are complicated and physically or financially taxing, but it's also hard to really feel the connection with *Hashem* that these *mitzvos* are supposed to cultivate, maintain, and nourish. After all, we can't see *Hashem*, can't feel him, and can't directly hear Him. Our *avodah*, therefore, becomes largely an *avodah* of *emunah*, of faith that *Hashem* is really there, that He really is involved in every moment of our lives, listening to every one of our *tefillos*, and rejoicing in every one of our *mitzvos*.

Therefore, by comparison, it almost seems that Avraham Avinu actually had it much easier. Except for the small little fact that he had to first search out and find the one God in a universal polytheistic environment, all Avraham really had to do after that was obey the Word of God **spoken to him personally**. So when *Hashem* tells Avraham directly that He promises to give him numerous offspring, among them kings and fathers of nations, as long as Avraham fulfills his side of the deal and gets a *bris milah*, Avraham obviously doesn't even hesitate. He immediately runs to give a *bris* to himself and his household, for after hearing the word of *Hashem*, the very same word of *Hashem* which a whole nation was too frightened to listen to at *Matan Torah* (*Shemos* 20:15-16), no one, least of all Avraham, would dare to even hesitate.

Reading *Parshas Lech Lecha* last week, this narrative seemed to fit very well. *Hashem* commands, Avraham rushes to obey. But then we get to *Parshas Vayeira*, and after just one *possuk*, the whole thing comes crashing down. The first *possuk* of *Vayeira* reads:

וַיָּרָא אֱלֹהִים ה' בְּאֵלֶיךָ מִמְּרָא וְהוּא יָשָׁב פְּתַח־הַאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם:  
"Hashem appeared to [Avraham] in the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." (Bereishis 13:1)

Rashi there quotes the *Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 42:8)* which comments that these plains where Hashem appeared to Avraham are called the plains of Mamrei, as a reward to Mamrei for giving Avraham proper advice when Avraham came to ask him what to do about the commandment of *bris milah*.

Wait a second. Something is off here. Why in the world did Avraham go to ask the advice of Mamrei, a non Jew, about whether or not he should fulfill the commandment of Hashem? When Hashem Himself tells you to do something, you don't go ask your friend what he thinks about it- you just do it!

The *Da'as Zekeinim* (a compilation authored mainly by the *Baalei Tosfos*) picks up on this glaring question. He answers that Avraham was not asking Mamrei if he should do the *bris* or not, but rather he was asking if he should do it publicly, and thus influence others to perform the *mitzvah* of *bris milah*, or if he should do it privately out of modesty.

The *Beis Aharon* (Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Horowitz), though, gives a different answer, one which, in my opinion, a) fits better with the *Medrash* which Rashi quotes, and b) teaches us a vital concept, a *yesod gadol*. The *Beis Aharon* describes that Avraham was actually asking Mamrei for advice about the order of the *bris milah*. In other words, Avraham was asking

who should get the *bris milah* first, Avraham or Yishmael? On the one hand, Avraham would have liked to perform all of the *Bris Milahs* as quickly as possible, because "when a *mitzvah* comes to your hand, dont let it leaven (i.e perform it quickly)" (*Mechilta Shemos 12:17*), and if he first performed a *bris* on himself, he would have to wait to heal before performing Yishmael's *bris*. On the other hand, Avraham knew that halachically, a *mohel* (the person who gives the *bris*) must himself have had a *bris*.

Mamrei's answer, as the *Beis Aharon* understands it, is vital for understanding human relationships and interactions. The *Beis Aharon* explains that Mamrei answered to Avraham: you go first, because only if you *demonstrate* your willingness to be an *eved Hashem*, even to the extent of extreme pain, will you be able to influence your son to feel the same way. It isn't enough to tell him of your feelings, not even enough to just give him a *bris milah* and hope it inspires him. You have to demonstrate and role model to him your passion, and only then will you have an influence on him. This is what the famous *possuk (Devarim 6:7)* in *krias shema* means when it says "and you shall teach them to your children and speak of them"- the best way for a parent to teach his or her children about the *mitzvos* is for them to be constantly talking about and involved in the *mitzvos* themselves

This principle, though, does not just apply to educating and giving over values to students and children, because not just parents and teachers have an impact on those around them. As the Rambam (*Hilchos Deos 6:1*) states, "It is the natural tendency of man to

## A SHORT VORT

*Akiva Kra (21)*

וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְהֵנָּה הוֹאֵלְתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי וְאֲנֹכִי עֹפָר וְאִפְרָי:"

"Avraham said, "Behold, I have begun to speak to my Lord, and I am but dirt and ashes." (Bereishis 18:27)

The Brisker Rav says that this particular metaphor by which Avraham chose to describe his lowliness before God has deep significance. Dirt was never anything but dirt previously, but it is quite useful as a medium for growing plants and food. It has a humble past but is of great value for the future. Ash, on the other hand, originates from something much more valuable than itself, but it has no practical benefit for any future use. Avraham depicted himself as combining the negative aspects of both of these items: He was of humble origin, like dirt, and did not consider himself to be of any value in the future, like ash.

The Lubavitch Rebbe said "Every day can be the first day of one's new life, if that's what they make it." Every day we wake up with great opportunities such as the ability to help out others and study the **Torah**. Chances like these, could be compared to the dirt that Avraham is referring to. By **planting** ourselves in positive actions, we can grow to unbelievable levels. And then, instead of being like burnt-out ashes, we could be a burning fire.

May we all be able to become the positive aspects that can be found in dirt and ashes.

be influenced in his ideas and conduct by his colleagues and friends". It follows from this that friends have the greatest ability to influence friends, and Mamrei's response teaches us how, in addition to gaining from our friends, we can actually be that positive influence on some level for them- not by putting ourselves above others and telling them what to do, but rather by role modeling to them, by 'letting our game do the talking'.

**Arise Like a Lion**  
*Meir Morell (22)*

יְשָׁכֵם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֶּקֶר אֶל-הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-עָמַד שָׁם אֶת-פָּנָיו יְהוָה  
 "Next morning, Avraham arose to the place where he had stood before the LORD" (Ber. 19,27) The Gemara in Brachos (26) explains that this means that Avraham had prayed in the morning and had established the tefilah of shacharis.

When I saw this *possuk*, I had been reminded of a thought I had come up with a few days ago. The first few paragraphs of the first chapter of the *chovas hatalmidim* of the Piaseczna Rebbe zy"ta explain the amazing privilege we have to connect to the Master of the Universe, and that we should be eager to perform *mitzvos* and pray and learn.

When I saw the words of this weeks *parsha* I immediately thought of this idea from the Piaseczner. The Torah here uses the word *vayashkem* to mean "and he arose", which usually seems to imply that it was earlier on in the morning. Our beloved father Avraham woke up eagerly to serve his creator and to connect to Him.

Often as usual people, we are not always motivated when we wake up every morning to "get up like a lion to serve our creator" (Shulchan Aruch 1:1). We usually get lost in the steps of life and forget about all the amazing chances we are given to connect to God and fulfill the real goal of life which is to "delight in God and to derive pleasure in the radiance of the *Shechinah* (divine presence)" (*Mesilas Yesharim* 1). May we all be able to fully connect to God and to bask in His presence with eager and Joy!

**Together**  
*Aaron Sisser (23)*

In this week's *Parsha*, *Parshas Vayeira*, it says the word "*yachdav*" - together- three times. The first time the Torah says this is right after Avraham and Yitzchak leave the rest of their camp and go to *Har Hamoriyah* - the Temple Mount, by themselves. The *possuk* states, "יָקַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵצֵי הָעֵלֶה וַיִּשָּׂם עַל-יִצְחָק - בְּנֵו יִצְחָק בְּדָו אֶת-הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת-הַמְּאֻכָּלִת וַיִּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו -"

**5 Minute Lomdus**

*Shimi Kaufman (21)*

וַיִּמַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנֵו בֶן-שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים:

"And Avraham circumcised his son Yitzchak when he was eight days old, as Hashem commanded him" (Bereishis 21:4)

**Q.** The Rivash, in his *shailos uteshuvos* (131) addresses an apparent contradiction in the Rambam, as in one place, the Rambam rules that one who performs *milah* on his son makes a *bracha* of "*vitzivanu lamol*" - who commanded us to circumcise, while elsewhere, the Rambam rules that a father who performs *pidyon haben* (redeeming a firstborn son from a *kohen*) makes a *bracha* with the words "*vitzivanu al pidyon haben*" - who commanded us regarding *pidyon haben*. Why does the language of the *bracha* change between the two *mitzvos*? The Rivash answers based on the Rambam (*Hilchos Brachos* 11:11), who rules that one who performs a *mitzvah* for himself makes a *bracha* with the words "*vitzivanu la'asos*" - "and commanded us to do" - while one who performs a *mitzvah* on behalf of someone else uses the words "*vitzivanu al mitzvas*" - "and commanded us regarding the mitzvah of...". Thus, he explains, one who performs *milah* on his son makes a *bracha* of "*vitzivanu lamol*" - who commanded us to circumcise - as the *milah* of the son is considered a requirement of the father, while one who performs *pidyon haben* makes a *bracha* of "*vitzivanu al pidyon haben*", since the *mitzvah* is really a requirement of the child, and it is only done by the father because the infant is unable to do it himself. The Rivash, however, does not explain the logic behind this distinction. Why is *milah* deemed to be a requirement on the father himself, while *pidyon haben* is considered a *chiyuv* on the actual child?

**A.** By *pidyon haben*, the main point of the *mitzvah* is that the child should be in a redeemed state; the actual process of how he gets to that state is largely irrelevant. Thus, the *mitzvah* is on the son himself, and the father only performs the *mitzvah* due to the child being unable to do it himself. However, regarding *bris milah*, there are actually two factors to the *milah*: one, that the child should be circumcised, and two, the actual action of *milah*. There are several proofs to this - for example, one who is born with a *milah* still requires that an action of *milah* be performed. Thus, while there is a *chiyuv* on the child that he should be in a circumcised state, there is also a requirement on the father to perform the action of *milah*.

“And Avraham took the wood for the korban, and gave it to Yitzchak, and Avraham himself took the fire and the knife, and both Avraham and Yitzchak went together to Har Hamoriyah.” The second time that the *possuk* says *yachdav* is only a couple *pesukim* later, and this time it comes right after Yitzchak asks his father where the materials for the *korban* that they will be bringing are. Avraham responds: “וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם - *And Avraham said, ‘Hashem will provide us with the lamb for the korban, my son,’ and the two of them went together.*” The third and final time that the word *yachdav* appears in *Parshas Vayiera* is after the events at *Har Hamoriah* took place. The angel already called out to Avraham and told him to not sacrifice his son because it was all a test of Avraham’s faith. *Hashem* had already blessed Avraham with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as numerous as each grain of sand on the beach. *Hashem* already promised Avraham everything, and that his future as the start of the new nation of *Am Yisroel* was secure. This is where our word, *yachdav*, comes in. After all of these amazing things were promised by *Hashem* to Avraham, Avraham and Yitzchak returned to the camp where the rest of the men that came with them were staying. The *possuk* says: “וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל-נַעֲרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יחדוֹ אֶל-בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּשְׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע” - “*And Avraham returned to his young men, and they got up and went together to Be’er Sheva, and Avraham stayed at Be’er Sheva.*”

What is the significance of the word *yachdav*, and why does the *Torah* feel the need to mention it three separate times? Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch gives an answer to this question, and says that the inclusion of the word *yachdav* is intended to show the greatness and humility of Avraham and Yitzchak. The word *yachdav* shows this as follows: The first two times that *yachdav* is said, it is talking about the events leading up to *Akeidat Yitzchak*, one of the greatest, if not the greatest, sacrifice ever performed by anyone in mankind. Avraham was then spoken to by *Hashem*, and was told that he will be immeasurably blessed, and that he will be the start of a great nation. Avraham and Yitzchak have just reached unimaginable spiritual heights. However, they did not think of themselves as above anyone else. Even after they were blessed directly by *Hashem*, they still kept a sense of humility within themselves. This is shown when the third time the *possuk* says *yachdav*. Avraham and Yitzchak went together with the rest of their attendants that were waiting for them. They went to Be’er Sheva together, with Avraham and Yitzchak walking with the others, unaffected by pride.

We can all learn from this that no matter how great the things that we achieve can be, no matter how much we feel we have accomplished, we still must always remember to be humble, and never to put our-

selves above others. We see from the actions of our forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, that one must never be affected by pride. May we all be *zocheh* to always be humble, to never be affected by pride, and to never put ourselves above others, and from this we should see, together, the coming of *Mashiach*, *bimheirah biyameinu Amen!*

### The Deeper Meaning Of The Commandment Of The Akeidah

*Eitan Rochwarger (24)*

One of the most well known parts of *Parshas Vayeira* is found in the last *perek* of the *parsha*, where the *pesukim* discuss Avraham’s mission to offer his son as a *korban* to *Hashem*. While reading these *pesukim* many questions arise from the vagueness in the words.

To start, the *possuk* states “Take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak.” The obvious question here is why *Hashem* says to take “your only son”, as we know from earlier in the *parsha* that Avraham has a son with his maidservant Hagar, named Yishmael. Yishmael comes up as soon as the next *possuk*, in which the *Midrash* says that Yishmael travelled with Avraham and Yitzchak on their journey, since the *possuk* says “two lads” were with them, referring to Yishmael and Avraham’s servant Eliezer. The *Midrash* interestingly also adds that when Avraham is “seeing” what will become the holiest place for the Jews (*Har Hamoriah*) he turns to them and asks “do you see what I see here”, to which they respond that they do not. This is the reason why Avraham puts them into the same phrase with the donkey, because he perceived them as equal to the donkey, since they both see nothing.

Now, back to the question on why *Hashem* says to take “your only son”, the *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 89b) writes on this that the conversation between *Hashem* and Avraham really went as follows: *Hashem* said “take your son”, to which Avraham responded “but I have two sons; which one should I take?” *Hashem* said back “your only one”, to which Avraham said “but each of them are the only son of their mother”. To this, *Hashem* said “the one you love”, and Avraham responded saying: “but I love them both”. After this, *Hashem* finally responds saying “your son Yitzchak”. The *Gemara* concludes from here that the reason why *Hashem* didn’t just say to Avraham to take Yitzchak from the beginning was because he would become bewildered by this request; after all the years of weeping for a son, such a sudden request to sacrifice him would have shocked Avraham. Later on, after Avraham leaves and Sarah hears about what he was doing and the fact that Yitzchak almost died, it was

too much for her to bear, and she passed away. Rashi adds to this, saying that this is the reason why *Hashem* had Avraham travel for three days to really think about what he was about to do. Rashi also adds that this way that *Hashem* gave this final test to Avraham by the slow uncovering of the identity of his sacrifice in order to make the *mitzvah* more rewarding, by arousing his curiosity.

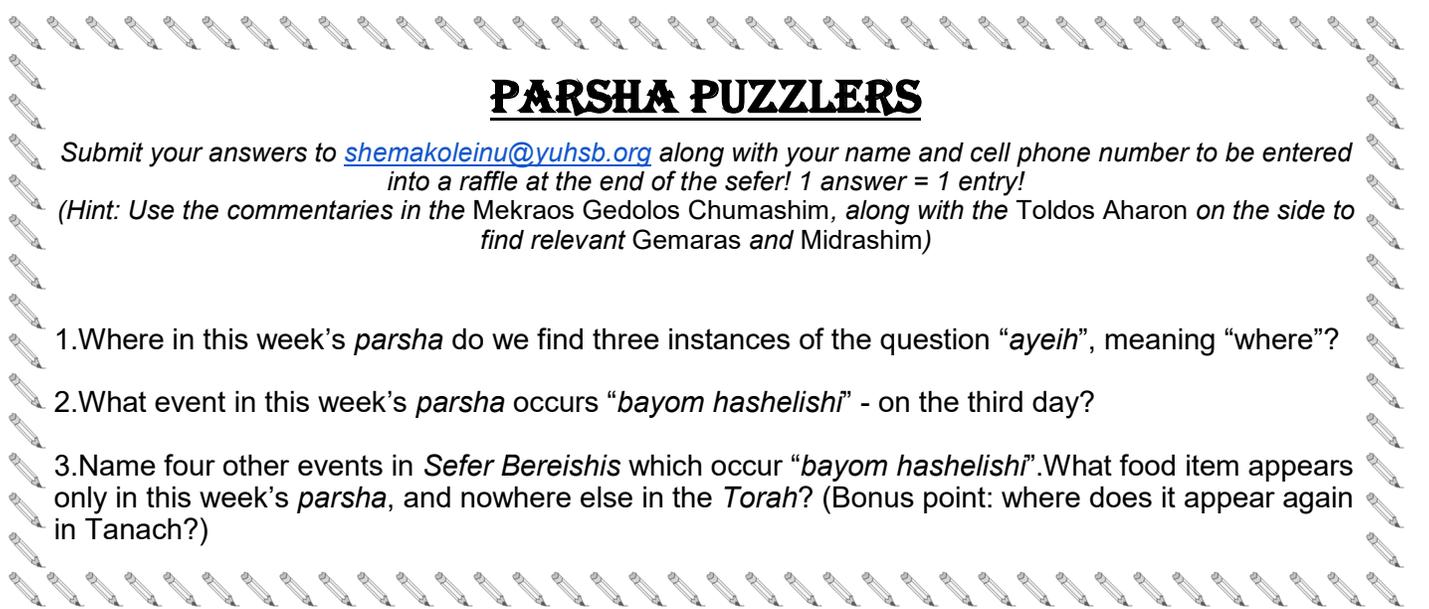
### **Avraham's Emunah**

*Ezra Henner (24)*

In last week's *parsha*, *Parshas Lech Lecha*, we learn of *Hashem's* very first promise to give Avraham (then known as Amram), a son to inherit his wealth in both the physical and spiritual sense. In response, Avraham tells *Hashem* that he trusts Him. Now, in *Parshas Vayeira*, we see the true extent of his belief in *Hashem*. To begin this chapter of Avraham's life, *Hashem* sends down three *mala'achim*, one of which was to deliver the news of pregnancy to Sarah. Avraham was of course thrilled to finally have the chance to have a son he could teach and guide in the ways of *Hashem*, saw that *Hashem's* guarantee was indeed legitimate, and when Yitzchak finally arrived, Avraham was beyond thrilled. When Yitzchak was around the age of 13 (according to the Rambam), Avraham is faced with a task that he felt that he could and should not perform: offer Yitzchak as a *korban*, an offering to *Hashem*. And yet, he responds to this task with an unbelievable amount of *emunah* in *Hashem*.

Avraham of course had a tremendous amount of *emunah* and *kavod* for *Hashem*, but even some of the

*Gedolim Hador* of today would hesitate to sacrifice their own son, let alone their only son! However, this was only a test of Avraham's devotion to *Hashem*, and he passed with flying colors. He was prepared to *shecht* Yitzchak, and was about to do so before he was stopped by *Hashem*. What is striking about this episode of Avraham and his devotion to his master is not only that he agreed to sacrifice his son right away, but that he also may have seen *Hashem's* test from the start, and that if he did not have this theory, than his immense belief in *Hashem* and how trustworthy he is. Looking back at the previous *parsha*, where *Hashem* tells Avraham that he will have an abundance of descendants, Avraham sees this promise, knows that it is sincere, and with great *emunah*, he takes Yitzchak. This overpowering virtue of belief we see out of Avraham in the *Akeidas Yitzchak* may be the most important lesson we can learn from Avraham from this *parsha*. We should all hope to be as much of a servant of *Hashem* as Avraham was in this *parsha*, and always see His word as written in stone. Whenever we think of how Avraham offered Yitzchak as a *korban*, with such little hesitation, we should strive to do the same whenever we seem in doubt of what is the best path for us to take. *Vayeira* teaches us this lesson, and we could only hope that we have an opportunity to serve *Hashem* this directly once again.



## **PARSHA PUZZLERS**

Submit your answers to [shemakoleinu@yuhsb.org](mailto:shemakoleinu@yuhsb.org) along with your name and cell phone number to be entered into a raffle at the end of the sefer! 1 answer = 1 entry!

(Hint: Use the commentaries in the Mekraos Gedolos Chumashim, along with the Toldos Aharon on the side to find relevant Gemaras and Midrashim)

1. Where in this week's *parsha* do we find three instances of the question "ayeih", meaning "where"?
2. What event in this week's *parsha* occurs "bayom hashelishi" - on the third day?
3. Name four other events in *Sefer Bereishis* which occur "bayom hashelishi". What food item appears only in this week's *parsha*, and nowhere else in the *Torah*? (Bonus point: where does it appear again in Tanach?)

# CHUMASH B'YUN

## Justice and Mercy and Salvific Saintliness

*Rabbi Mayer Schiller*

“And Avraham drew near, and said, ‘Will You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?’ Perhaps there will be fifty righteous within the city: will You also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? Far be it (alternative: “sacrilege”) from You to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from you. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Bereishis 18: 23-25)

The *Ohr Hachaim* and other commentaries are concerned with a seeming disorder in Avraham's presentation of requests. First, he asks that the righteous not be destroyed with the wicked. Why should innocent men be killed? Then, he apparently raises the stakes and requests that the wicked be spared due to the righteous that are in their midst. Then, however, he returns to the first and simpler request that the individual righteous not be slain as the wicked. “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?”

Assuming, perhaps, that Avraham, not rebuffed on his first request, then proceeded to the more audacious second request, then why revert again in the third request to that which has already been asked in the first? The *Ohr Hachaim* explains the sequence of requests as follows: The second request was that even if *Hashem* had decided to destroy all the wicked people, why couldn't he have devised a plan to save them by leaving the righteous there? Unlike what eventually happened, when *Hashem* took Lot and his family outside the city before destroying it, there was a better possibility of keeping the righteous in place, as the *possuk* says regarding the fifty men, they “are within it.” Being “within” will be a protection for all.

At this point we have a request for justice followed by a request for mercy, as the *Ohr Hachaim* writes, “that the law (*kav hadin*) not be enforced to its fullest extent.”

But, why then the reversion to the previously stated request for justice? The *Ohr Hachaim* posits that it is not a simple reversion to the prior argument. Rather, “If You kill the righteous along with the wicked, people will view a righteous person as being on the same level as the wicked, and people will not strive to be righteous.” In fact, his comments go even further when explaining the repetition of the phrase “*chalilah lecho*”, “forbid it for you.” (Bereishis 18:25) First, he asks that G-d not “do this thing” and then “not to do justice.” Two types of question are seemingly articulated in one *possuk*. The *Ohr Hachaim* avers that the first is the simple injustice of punishing the righteous (as stated in verse 23) with the false impression this would yield and then, a further argument, that G-d has already sworn in the past “not to bring the flood waters of Noach” ever again. When He made that oath, “He indicated that He would no longer apply the law to the furthest extent.” Thus, the third argument of Avraham, although ostensibly the same as his first, was, in fact, vastly different.

The *Divrei Dovid* views the three requests of Avraham from a different perspective. He sees the first request as not a *tefillah* at all. It was simply a request that *Hashem* be just. The second request to spare the wicked due to the righteous was an actual prayer. It was asking that *Hashem* go beyond justice to mercy. Finally, “if the prayer doesn't help, then at the very least He should at least be just.” So, the third request, according to the *Divrei Dovid*, was a simple return to the original argument.

R. Wolf Hedenheim (1757 – 1832), the German commentator on Rashi, in his *Havonas Hamikra*, posits that Rashi himself answers the question on the progression of the three *pesukim*. The first *possuk* is to be understood (18:23) in the words of Rashi, “Will your anger steer you to obliterate righteous with wicked.”

Then, the second request is that ten men in each city should be able to protect those cities. But even if *Hashem* should insist on destroying the wicked, why should He also destroy the righteous. Thus, the last *possuk* offers a further argument, that people will say, “Such is His craft. He washes away everything, the righteous and wicked. So did You do to the generation of the flood and the generation of the dispersal.” Thus, the final argument is simply a desire to prevent the desecration of G-d's Name.

It is worth noting in this context that a phrase appears in *possuk* 26 which is only seen there. First, Avraham asks the righteous who were “in the midst of the city.” God then tells Avraham that He will not destroy the city if “fifty righteous men are found in the midst of the city.” R. Avrohom ibn Ezra tells us that “in the midst of” means that the righteous were trying to correct the wicked. They were “in the midst of things.” Thus, to God, saintliness that might protect others demanded that the righteous be actively involved in promoting the good and seeking to change the wicked.

This *peshat* may give us some further understanding as to why Avraham sought to spare the wicked in his phase two argument, but reverts back to only the righteous in phase three. Those *tzadikim* who can save the city are only those involved in transforming it. They may have the merit to spare the city, but the others merit only to spare themselves.

# FROM THE EDITORS' DESK

## Don't Be Salty

By far one of the most bizarre occurrences in this week's *parsha* is the fate of Lot's wife. After fleeing the burning ruins of Sedom, Lot and his family were given one instruction by the *ma'alach* leading them: whatever you do, don't turn around. Despite this warning, Lot's wife could not resist turning back to look, and as soon as she did so, she turned into a pillar of salt (*Bereishis* 19:25). The classical *meforshim* are oddly silent in explaining this supernatural occurrence. Why was Lot's wife punished by being turned into a pillar of salt, of all things?

The *Medrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 51:4) offers us a clue as to what happened here. The punishment, the *Medrash* explains, was *middah kineged middah* - measure for measure. In other words, Lot's wife sinned with salt, and in return, she was punished with salt. The *Medrash* goes on to explain that the night before, when the angels came to stay by Lot, Lot's wife realized that they did not have any salt in the house. As a result, she went to the neighbors to borrow salt, and in so doing accidentally let slip that they were hosting guests in their home, a capital crime in Sedom. As a punishment, she was turned into a pile of salt. While this explanation certainly begins to clarify what is happening here, there are still a few lingering issues. One, why was borrowing salt deemed such a big sin on the part of Lot's wife; even if she was a bit careless in revealing the secret guests, why was this punishable by death? And two, the punishment does not fit the crime; the *possuk* says that Lot's wife was turned into salt because she looked back, not because of something which happened the night before! Why was being turned into a pillar of salt an appropriate punishment for looking back at Sedom's destruction?

This week, one of my *rabbeim* showed me a slip he received in a fortune cookie, which he had placed inside of his wallet. The slip read "do not let what you do not have distract you from using what you do have." Human nature is to focus on what is lacking in our lives. It's easy to understand why; complaining about what we are missing gives us a convenient excuse to fall back on when we don't succeed. But this kind of thinking can be extremely hindering. When we spend all of our energy on complaining about circumstances beyond our control, we end up stopping ourselves from using the resources we do have to move forward. We get so hung up on what went wrong, that we stop trying to make things go right!

This kind of thinking betrays a certain lack of *emunah* in *Hashem*. In any situation, *Hashem* gives us the tools necessary to succeed. Rabbi Yonasan Sacks *shlit"a* proved this from a simple logical derivation; if life is a series of tests from *Hashem*, then it follows that we have the ability to succeed wherever we may find ourselves, since if not, why would *Hashem* give us a test that we cannot pass? But, when we complain about factors which did not line up with our expectations, we are effectively declaring that the tools which *Hashem* provided are insufficient!

The Lot household was very busy on the night of Sedom's destruction. There were guests, which almost never happened, and the house was likely abuzz with excitement. And yet, Lot's wife can only focus on one thing: there's no salt. Lot's wife spends the entire night going to neighbors and asking them to borrow salt. She is unable to enjoy her company, because she is so concerned about the missing salt!

This is Lot's wife's main problem; she is constantly focused on that which she does not have, and so she is unable to proceed in her current situation. She spends all of her time reminiscing what she used to have and bemoaning her current predicament, rather than recognizing that she has the ability to succeed no matter where she is or what happens. As Sedom burns, she cannot bring herself to move on and take the initiative in her new situation; she is stuck on the past, looking at everything she lost and all that she no longer has. And so, she turns into a pillar of salt, a crushing symbol of her inability to move past that which she lacks.

The pandemic has stifled opportunities for all of us; whether it's issues with *shiur*, classes, or extracurriculars, this year has not been ideal for anyone. But, we cannot get stuck on what we no longer have. We need to recognize that the current situation, however frustrating, is **exactly where we need to be** to have the most success possible this year. Let's make sure to move forward with what we have, without turning into a pillar of salt. *Good Shabbos!*

- Shimi Kaufman

## CHASIDUS ON THE PARSHA

*Peshurin Sorscher ('21)*

We all know that *Hashem* is infinite, complex, and omnipresent. Somehow, however, he is able to create the world, which is finite and physical. The question we all have to deal with is, how could a Being who is infinite limit Himself to the finite? How is spirituality able to exist in the physical world? The *Noam Elimelch* writes that *Hashem* contracted himself into the letters of the *Torah*. Through the *Torah*, *Hashem's* presence is in this world. God, with his infinite wisdom, was able to create the unthinkable, and found a way to both have the infinite and the finite exist together. The *Torah*, through the letters that are found within, is able to accomplish this seemingly impossible task. Additionally, the *tzaddik* who learns the *Torah* is able to bring *Hashem* into the world through his learning. This is what the *possuk* in our *parsha* (*Bereishis* 13:1) means what it says that "*Hashem* appeared to him [Avraham] in Elonei Mamrei". The word *elonei* means tree, and we see in many places that the *Torah* is compared to a tree, such as when we say in *davening* that the *Torah* is an "*Eitz Chaim*", a tree of life. Thus, when Avraham was sitting, he was really learning *Torah* and preparing himself for *Hashem* to appear to him. These ideas are seemingly too esoteric for us laymen to understand, and to a certain extent it is beyond us. Yet there are some crucial lessons that we can learn. We see that no matter where we are, we will always have the *Torah* with us, and that when we learn it, *Hashem* is there with us. There is also a deeper message, that Avraham was able to see *Hashem* specifically because of his *Torah* learning; so too, may we all merit through our *Torah* learning to see *Hashem* in our lives.

## WISDOM FROM THE HAFTORAH

נְעֹשֶׂה-נָא עֲלֵית־קִיר קִטְנָה וְנִשִּׂים לוֹ שֵׁם מִטָּה וְשִׁלְחָן וְכִסֵּא וּמִנּוּרָה וְהָיָה בְּבֵאוֹ אֵלֵינוּ יְסוּר שְׁמָה:

"Let us make a small enclosed attic, and we will place for him there a bed, a table, a chair, and a lantern, and when he comes to us he can stay here" (*Melachim II* 4:10).

The Kabbalists point out that the first letters of the four items which the *Ishah Shunamis* prepared for Elisha - *נר* - *כסא* - *שולחן* - *מטה* spell the word *משכן*, meaning dwelling. The Vilna Gaon comments on a *Gemara* in *Berachos* (8a), in which Reish Lakish says that one who has a *shul* in his city and does not daven there is called a *shachen ra*, a bad neighbor, and brings *galus* (exile) upon himself and his children. The Gra explains that the day can be divided up into four times: morning, afternoon, night, and the late night. The first three of these times have assigned *tefilos* of *shacharis*, *mincha*, and *ma'ariv*. However, late at night, people are in their homes, away from *shul*. These four times, continues the Gra, correspond to the four items which the *Ishah Shunamis* placed in Elisha's room: the chair, candle, and table can be found in any *shul*, but a bed can be found only at home. Thus, the *נר* *שולחן* represents the *shul*; as a result, one who does not attend *shul* is called a *שכן רע*, a bad neighbor. Going further, we can explain that one's home can only be called a true dwelling, a true *mishkan*, if he combines all four of these elements; that is, that he takes the *shul* into his home with him. One who does not go to *shul* causes *galus* for himself and his children, because he will inevitably fail to create an environment in his home which teaches his children to emulate *Torah* values. We must bring our *shuls* and *yeshivos* into our homes with us, making sure that our lives are not just spiritual when we are *davening* or learning, but throughout our regular, day-to-day activities.

## GEDOLIM GLIMPSE: RAV MESHULAM ROTH

*Meir Morell ('22)*



Rav Meshulam Roth (1875-1962) was born in Gorodenka, Galicia (now in Ukraine) to Rav Shimon and Elka Roth. As a young child, Meshulam was known as an incredible learner and *masmid*. His father was a Chortkov chasid, a branch of the Chasidic Dynasty of Ruzhyn. The first time his father took him to the *Rebbe*, Rabbi David Moshe of Chortkov, Rabbi Meshulam was nine years old. Being studious, he went with hundreds of *chasidim* to hear the *droshah* of the city's Rabbi, a great *talmid chacham*. Afterwards he was asked if he understood, and he nodded his head, going on to repeat the speech exactly how the Rabbi said it, even including his body movements.

Rabbi Meshulam studied with the eminent rabbis in his vicinity who were associated with courtyards of Beis Ruzhyn, among them Rabbi Ya'akov Weidenfeld, author of '*Kochav MiYa'akov*, whose son, the Rabbi of Tshebin (who was the *gadol* from last week), honored Rabbi Roth as if he was a student before his rabbi, and said about him: "Rabbi Roth was considered one of the *Gedolei Hador* while he was still an *avreich* (young *yeshiva* student)." Rabbi Roth also studied with Rabbi Avraham Steinberg, author of "*Mechazei Avraham*". However, his most prominent rabbi was Rabbi Meir Arik, author of '*Minchas Pitim*' on *Shulchan Aruch*, and the Responsa '*Imrei Yosher*', as well as other works. Before he reached the age of *bar mitzvah*, the wealthy Rabbi Shimshon Steinholtz from Melnitsa chose him as the groom for his daughter Tzipora, and she even embroidered the first pouch for his *tefillin*. During the long years between the engagement and the marriage, one of Russia's wealthiest Jews offered the intended father-in-law a large sum of money, if he would agree to hand over the match to his own daughter. Rabbi Shimshon rejected the proposal, saying: "All the wealthy Russian Jews put together do not have enough money to match the worth of such a groom." In 1894, when almost twenty, he married Tziporah, and they lived in her parents' home in Melnitsa where he served as rabbi – without expectation of receiving any pay – for approximately four years. Two children were born to them, the eldest Ephraim, and the second, Sarah. Ephraim had brilliant talents, and grew in *Torah*. Every week, Rabbi Roth would study the *parsha* with Sarah, and on Friday night, he learned with her from the book '*Ein Ya'akov*', and taught her much of Tanach.

Despite Khorostakiv being a small town, it merited having great rabbis serving there. In continuation of this tradition, Rabbi Roth was presented as a candidate for the town's rabbinical office. As was customary in those days, the candidates for the rabbinate would give a *droshah* before the public on *Shabbos*, and that would determine who would be appointed rabbi. When Rabbi Roth's *Shabbos* arrived, at two in the afternoon, everyone gathered in the Great Synagogue. The rabbi stood by the pulpit, holding a Tanach, and gave a *droshah* for six consecutive hours. In the *droshah*, he exhibited proficiency and acumen in *Shas* and *poskim*, and everyone marveled at his greatness. He was elected rabbi of the town in 1898 at the age of twenty-four, and for approximately thirty years, served as the community's rabbi. He was active in the organization '*MiTzion Teitzei Torah*', and founded a school in the spirit of *Mizrachi* in Khorostkiv, in addition to founding and heading a *yeshiva*. For this *yeshiva*, he wrote his famous curriculum. He was accustomed to test the younger students twice a week, and once a week gave an in-depth class to the older students. Since he knew both German and Polish, he would sometimes speak on behalf of the public and the rabbis with government officials.

In addition to his tremendous genius, he was also a *tzaddik*, and his prayers were said with devotion and the outpouring of his soul. He had a very pleasant voice, and it is said that anyone who heard him sing the prayer "*Nishmas*" on *Shabbos*, would think about repentance. The Admorim would also rise early in the morning, and go to his house to hear him speak words of *chassidus*.

He was active in the *Mizrachi* movement, and was also elected on its behalf as a representative to the Twelfth Zionist Congress in 1921. It should be noted that in his association with the Admorim of Beis Ruzhyn, his love of *Eretz Yisrael* and his support of *aliyah* were not seen as a great surprise, for a number of the Admorim of Ruzhyn also supported *Mizrachi*.

The *gabbaim* of Lemberg (Lvov) offered him the rabbinate of their important city, whose rabbis were always *geonei olam*; however, it was on condition he cease his activity for the Land of Israel. Of course, he refused. In 1935, he was finally elected to the Czernowitz Rabbinate, in which a large and important Jewish community of about fifty thousand Jews were active. There, he established a *beis medrash* for Rabbis. It seems that his Zionist positions saved him, for if he had been elected as Rabbi in Lemberg, he would have suffered the Holocaust like

the rest of the Jews of Poland, of whom only a small number were saved.

One of the candidates competing against him for the Chernovtsy Rabbinate was Rabbi Rubin, who suggested that Rabbi Roth, who was then a widower, marry his widowed sister Leah. In 1936 they married, and she stood at his side, immigrated to Israel with him, and devoted herself to his well-being until her last days. She died three years before him.

Even when overcome by weakness in his last years, he did not cease to engross himself in *Torah*. Even during his last days, while suffering in agony, he sang *deveikus niggunim* (songs of closeness to God) such as 'Vekarev Pizureinu' and 'Nishmas Kol Chai', and while doing so, returned his soul in purity to its Creator, on the 26th of Kislev 1962. His funeral went forth from the *Mercaz Harav*, where he was eulogized by the greatest *gedolim* of the time.

## HALACHA HASHAVUAH

*Josef Weiner (23)*

We learn the concept of *makom kavua*, having a set place to daven, from Avrohom Avinu going "to the place where he had stood before Hashem" (*Bereishis* 19:27). The *Gemara* says that praise is said post-mortem about one who had a *makom kavua*, and that he is declared a student of Avrohom (*Berachos* 6b). The *Shulchan Aruch paskens* that one must have a *makom kavua* within the *shul*, and it is not enough to simply *daven* in the same *shul* consistently (*Orach Chayim* 90:19). A four *amah* area is considered to be one place, and one does not need to be more precise than this in maintaining his *makom kavua* (*Magen Avraham* O.C. 90:34 and *Mishnah Brurah* 90:60). In addition, one should have a *makom kavua* in their house (M.B. 90:59) even if they do not typically *daven* there (*Ma'amar Mordechai* Vol. 1 90:22). However, if people are speaking by one's *makom kavua* (or otherwise being a distraction) an individual is able to *daven* elsewhere (*Kaf Hachayim* 90:118). Furthermore, one should have a *makom kavua* for learning (M.B. 155:7).

What part of *tefillah* requires a *makom kavua*? The *Toras Chayim* says that *makom kavua* specifically applies to *shemoneh esrei* (Vol. 1 90:25). However, Rabeinu Yonah (*Berachos* 3, 2 of the Rif) counters that one should also have a *makom kavua* for *pesukei dizimra* as well. Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach says that even if going to one's *makom kavua* will force them to skip more of *pesukei dizimra* because of the need to catch up with the *tzibbur*, one should still go to it, since one's *davening* improves when they are in their *makom kavua* (*Ishei Yisroel* 89:40).

The *Shulchan Aruch* does not mean to say that one needs to daven his entire life in one place. Even Avrohom Avinu traveled! Rather, one should not arbitrarily change where he is praying. The *Pri Megadim* writes that if someone davens in one spot in the winter and one in the summer, he is considered to have a *makom kavua* (*Pri Megadim Ohr Hachaim Aishel Avraham* 90:33). Furthermore, if one in every three **tefillios**, an individual davens in another *shul*, or if he davens in one *shul* on *shabbos* and another during the week. Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach is of the opinion that he is considered to have a *makom kavua*, and he in fact did this himself (*Halichos Shlomo Teffilah* P. 60 *Devar Halachah* 2). Even if one only *davens* in a *shul* twice a year, he should make a *makom kavua* there (*Rosh Yosef Berachos* 6).

If an *avel*, a mourner, would be unable to be the *shaliach tzibbur* in his *shul*, Rav Elyashiv says one may daven elsewhere because of *kibbud av vi'eim*. Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach and Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky say one does not need to change where they *daven* except for on the *yahrzeit*, when one should go to another place to be the *shaliach tzibbur*. Likewise, Rav Nissim Karelitz says that since every *mitzvah* a son does is an (elevation of the soul) for the parent, so too, *davening* in one's *makom kavua* is *iluy neshamah* (*Dirshu Mishnah Berurah* footnote 90:69). Lastly, it goes without saying that one should never *chas vishalom* embarrass another person or get into fights in order to sit in one's *makom kavua*.

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## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: ANIMALS IN THE PARSHA

*Yisroel David Rosenberg (23)*  
A Cave's Cameo

"וְאֵל-הַבָּקָר, רֵץ אַבְרָהָם; וַיִּקַּח בֶּן-בְּקָר רַךְ וְטוֹב, וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הַנָּעַר, וַיְמַהֵר, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ."  
"And to the herd Avraham ran, he took a calf, tender, and good, and he gave it to the boy who hurried to prepare it." (Bereishis 18:7)

Rashi comments on this *possuk* and says that Avraham took not one calf from the herd, but three. Each adjective of that which Avraham collects from the herd is a separate calf; one calf, another tender one, and another good one.

There is also a *Midrash* from *Pirkei De'Rabi Eliezer* that speaks about Avraham's speed in the first four words of the *possuk*. The *Midrash* describes Avraham as chasing after a runaway calf. He follows it all the way to *Ma'aras Hamachpeilah*, where he sees Adam and Chava buried. This is how he knows of the cave when it comes time to bury Sarah.

*Avi Mori*, Rabbi Moshe Rosenberg, suggested a reason for Avraham to be shown the cave at this time. This week's *parsha* is one filled with acts of *chessed* (kindness), and Avraham is famous for the *mid-dah* of *chessed*. Rashi famously describes how the *parsha* begins with *Hashem's* appearing to Avraham after his *bris milah*, performing the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick). Avraham also runs to welcome the *malachim*, performing the *mitzvah* of *hachnasas orchim* (hosting guests). Avraham da-vens for Sedom to be saved, and so on and so forth. Avraham is rewarded with the knowledge of the *ma'arah* in return for his *chessed*; he receives a *chessed* in exchange for his *chessed*. He is enabled to bury his wife there after she dies, thereby performing the ultimate *chessed*, and he is buried there by both Yitzchak and Yishmael, united in the same ultimate act of *chessed*. *Chessed* is Avraham's *middah* and his legacy, and therefore the legacy of all of *Am Yisroel*.

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## Parsha Summary

*Hashem* visits Avraham at his tent three days after his *bris*, when Avraham suddenly sees three angels, disguised as ordinary men, standing in the distance. Avraham runs to bring them into his home and feed them, and one of the men reveals that Sarah will have a child in a year's time; hearing this, Sarah laughs. The angels leave, and *Hashem* reveals to Avraham that He plans to destroy Sedom, a hotbed of immorality. Avraham pleads with *Hashem* to spare Sedom, but to no avail. The angels go to Sedom to save it, and Lot, Avraham's nephew, invites them to his house. As the angels begin to destroy Sedom, one of the angels tells Lot to flee with his family and not to look back. Lot's wife turns back to look, and turns into a pillar of salt. Lot hides in a cave with his two daughters, who are convinced that the whole world has been destroyed along with Sedom. As such, they see it as their responsibility to repopulate the world, so they get Lot drunk and have two children with him, Ammon and Moav. Avraham moves to Gerar, where the king of the Pelishtim, Avimelech, kidnaps Sarah after being led to believe she was Avraham's sister. *Hashem* tells Avimelech to let Sarah go, and Avimelech does so. *Hashem* causes Sarah to give birth to a son, Yitzchak, and Avraham performs a *bris milah* on him. Hagar's son, Yishmael, becomes a wild person, and Avraham banishes the two of them from his home. Yishmael becomes very sick, and Hagar *davens* that he be saved. *Hashem* hears her *teiflos* and saves him. Years later, *Hashem* commands Avraham to take his son, Yitzchak, and bring him as a *korban* - the ultimate test of loyalty. Avraham is prepared to do so, but before he brings the knife down, an angel comes down to tell him that it was just a test. In Yitzchak's place, Avraham brings a ram as a *korban*, and consecrates the place, which would become the site of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

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