

Kushner Comments

Parshat Vayeira

Friday, November 3, 2017 י"ד חשוון תשע"ז

From the Lower School

1. How many angels came to visit Avraham?
2. If Sedom was going to be saved, how many righteous people needed to be in the city?
3. What happened to Lot's wife?
4. How old was Avraham when Yitzchak was born?
5. What animal was stuck in the bush during the *akeidah*?

— Rabbi Aron Srolovitz — JKHA Assistant Principal

Answers can be found on the last page.

From the Middle School

Where do All Our Prayers Go?

In this week's *parsha* Avraham Avinu gives us many examples of how to take care of guests. Despite his age and his recovery from his *brit*, Avraham goes out of his way to entertain and care for his guests. He runs to perform the *chesed* in the best possible way. The Gemara tells us that in the merit of Avraham providing the angels with bread, water, and by watching over them, Bnei Yisrael merited the *mannah*, the well, and the protective clouds. The Gemara then asks on this that these three gifts were in the merit of Moshe, Miriam and Aharon?

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz answered that Avraham Avinu planted the seeds for these gifts, and Moshe, Miriam and Aharon brought them to fruition. He goes on to explain that many a time when we do a *mitzvah* we don't see the outcome. Hashem may store the outcome and the reward for a different time. This thought is echoed in the *aseret hadibrot* where we say that Hashem stores the reward for thousands of

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From the Middle School

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generations. This indicates to us that our *mitzvot* should be performed with a broad perspective and with the understanding that the reward for the *mitzvah* may come to assist a relative of a future generation.

- Rabbi Reuvain Greenberg — MS, Judaic Faculty

From the High School

Learning From Sarah *Imeinu*

In this week's *parsha*, *Vayera*, Yishmael and his mother, Hagar, are banished and sent away from Avraham and Sarah. The obvious question is why. Why are they banished? Didn't Hagar give Avraham his first child, a baby boy? Most people assume that this happened because Sarah thought Yishmael was a bad influence on Yitzchak. But is that really true? When you think about it, how can a son of Avraham Avinu be such a bad person, that he would be a bad influence on someone? And yet, many sources in Chazal do explain that Yishmael did many bad things, but is that really why he and his mother were banished?

I once heard a great idea that the banishment came about after Sarah realized that her earlier intentions could not come to fruition. At first, Sarah thought that she could handle both Hagar and Yishmael and that their relationship in the family wouldn't lead to anything bad. She thought she could share Avraham. As people, we may have good intentions, but sometimes it doesn't work in the end. So in this case, Sarah said to Avraham that they needed to send Hagar and Yishmael out because she then saw that it wasn't a good relationship. Sarah also knew by then that Yishmael wasn't the one from which the nation would develop. As a result, they sent them away.

There is a deep message from this, which shows us that everyone has flaws and we can't always do what we plan because we don't always know what the outcome will be. At the very least, we must make sure we always begin with good intentions. In this example, even though Sarah thought she could handle the difficult situation, ultimately she could not, so we learn by this that no one is perfect, even our role models, such as Sarah *Imeinu*, so all the more so we should realize our own boundaries and our limits. If we don't do this then we can hurt ourselves and we can hurt others. Despite the flaws that are a part of every human being, there are also strengths that characterize every human being. These strengths can overpower these flaws, just like when we think of Sarah we think of her

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From the High School

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important role as the matriarch of the Jewish people. Be inspired by this story because one should always be allowed to make a mistake and change one's mind, but if it's done with good intentions and righteous purpose, the goodness and strength will prevail.

- Jason Singer is a Freshman in RKYHS

Give or Take

Former President John F. Kennedy once stated, "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." In Judaism we say, "Ask not what your brother can do for you – ask what you can do for your brother," as we see in this week's *parsha*, *Vayera*.

Each of our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, was known for excelling in a particular character trait. In this week's *parsha* we get a close-up look at our founding father Avraham's exemplary trait. Avraham excelled at doing *chesed*, performing acts of kindness. The Torah highlights Avraham's unique *chesed* with one particular incident. His kindness certainly appears to be impressive, but a closer look reveals that the Torah is actually citing a somewhat puzzling example to teach us that Avraham was the paradigm of *chesed*.

Avraham was sitting outside his tent looking for guests to invite inside. But there were no guests to be found! This was the third day after Avraham had received his circumcision, which is said to be the most painful phase of the recovery. Hashem didn't want Avraham to be burdened with his usual responsibility of taking care of all his guests, so He caused it to be an exceptionally hot day, so not a soul would venture out in the sweltering heat. However, not being able to perform his usual acts of kindness disturbed Avraham greatly. When Hashem saw how disappointed Avraham was, He sent three angels in the guise of humans. Upon seeing them, Avraham enthusiastically jumped up and invited them in. They accepted the invitation and were given the royal treatment. The Torah delineates for us exactly what Avraham prepared for them to eat and drink, as well as how he waited on them for their every need.

Your initial reaction is probably: Wow! Truly amazing! Avraham didn't even know these "people," yet look how much he went out of his way to do all this *chesed* for total strangers.

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Out of all the acts of kindness that Avraham performed in his life, it is quite puzzling why this is the one showcased for us in the Torah. It would be understandable for the Torah to recount a story where the recipients of Avraham's kindness were real human beings who really needed and could appreciate all that Avraham did for them. Why choose a story where the recipients of the kindness were spiritual entities that didn't really benefit at all?

The reason why the Torah chose this incident is because this particular incident teaches us the most fundamental qualities of true *chesed*. When Avraham discovered Hashem, he wished to create a relationship with Him. We know from the world around us that one of the keys to forming a relationship is compatibility. If there is no compatibility, chances are the relationship will not go too far. However when two parties share similar traits of personality, upbringing, culture, or goals in life, the relationship has a much better chance of thriving. With this in mind, Avraham said to himself, "I will study the ways of Hashem. I will try to emulate Him to the best of my ability, thereby creating compatibility. By becoming 'similar' to Hashem, on a human level, I will form a relationship with Him." One of the aspects of Hashem that stood out to Avraham was His extreme kindness to the world, from the food He provides every human creature to the materials He provides for clothing and shelter and so on. This truly impressed Avraham, so he chose to emulate God by engaging in as many acts of kindness as he could towards his fellow man.

This teaches us what *chesed*, truly is. As I once saw it succinctly put, "It's mathematically improbable, but the more you give of yourself, the more you gain." When a person performs an act of *chesed*, he or she, as the giver, may actually be gaining more than the receiver by emulating Hashem, becoming more "God-like," and thereby forming a stronger relationship with Him.

Therefore the Torah specifically chose a story where the recipients of Avraham's *chesed* didn't benefit at all – to teach us that, in essence, the giver is the one who truly gains.

- Rabbi Mayer Erps — HS, Judaic Faculty

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- (1) 3 (2) 10 (3) She turned into a pillar of salt
(4) 100 (5) A Ram