

הַדָּבָר
יִסְתַּדּוּ

פרשת וירא Parshat Vayeira

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion



Spreading Righteousness

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Zachy Dennis (23')

Meira Salit (24')

Orly Dimont (23')

Binny Perl (24')

Parshat Vayeira includes the famous negotiation between Avraham and Hashem over the fate of the cities of Sodom and Amorah. Upon hearing the news that

these cities are evil and are facing total destruction, Avraham raises a philosophical concern:

האף תספה צדיק עם רשע?

“Will You [God] destroy the righteous along with the wicked?” (Bereishit 18:23).

Avraham is troubled. What if there happen to be a few righteous people within the borders of Sodom and Amorah? Why should they suffer the same collective fate as their evil neighbors? That would be unfair!

But what kind of question is this!? Why does Avraham assume that God -- the Ultimate Judge -- would mete out a punishment that was unfair?

R' Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that Avraham's question must be understood differently. Of course Avraham wasn't suggesting that God would be unfair! Instead, says R' Hirsch, Avraham imagined what it would feel like to be one of the few righteous people in the city. Surely those tzaddikim would have tried their hardest to influence their neighbors to change their ways, to make better choices, to be better people. In fact, R' Hirsch points out that Avraham refers to the potential tzaddikim as being “בתוך העיר” -- in the midst of the city”. To Avraham, this meant that they were out and about in the streets of the Sodom, among the people, fervently trying to spread their messages of morality to anyone who might listen! And because of their efforts, it would certainly devastate them -- “destroy them”, even -- to witness the destruction of the city and people they tried so hard to improve.

So when Avraham questions God, he's not suggesting that God would ever kill the righteous along with the wicked. Instead, he's making the argument that by destroying the wicked, God would also be "destroying" the righteous, causing them terrible pain at the thought that they didn't do enough, that their efforts to save the people of Sodom had failed.

This explanation makes it easier to understand the rest of the negotiation as well! God seems to agree: if Avraham can find any righteous people in the city, not only will God protect their physical lives, but He will save the whole city for their sake -- so that they do not have to suffer the emotional pain of watching their holy efforts go up in flames.

What an insight this provides into the kind of person Avraham was! Avraham assumes that any tzaddikim in Sodom would obviously have tried to influence others to be better people because to Avraham, righteousness means working your hardest to elevate not only yourself but everyone around you as well! This was Avraham's own approach and mission -- not simply to become a follower of God and the Torah's morality, but to spread godliness and morality to everyone he encountered! True righteousness, real goodness is supposed to be contagious! As we grow and deepen our own commitment to Hashem and His Torah, we have to consider how we can contribute to bettering the world around us too!

Pure Chesed

Zachy Dennis ('23)

In Parshat Vayeira, Avraham pleads to Hashem not to wipe out the people of Sodom. The pasuk says:

וַיֵּגֶשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֵף תִּסְּפֶה צְדִיקִים עִם
רָשָׁע

"And Avraham approached and said, will you really wipe out the innocent with the guilty?" (Bereishit 18:23).

He desperately tries to see if there is any way that Hashem will save the city. Avraham originally tries to find 50 tzaddikim whose merits would save the city, but he keeps lowering the number due to a lack of tzaddikim. After concluding that there are not even 10 righteous individuals to be found, he realizes Sodom won't be saved and finally caves in.

While Avraham is the epitome of kindness, this episode seems a little strange as the people of Sodom

were notorious for their wickedness and even considered chesed a crime! Why did Avraham daven on behalf of these corrupt citizens of Sodom if this is true? Rav Moshe Feinstein suggests a beautiful explanation of what's happening here. Ordinary people spread kindness but become angry at those who don't follow them. On the other hand, Avraham cared only for the truth as defined by the Torah. He felt no hate towards those who sinned, just a genuine desire for them to do teshuva. So too here, Avraham felt that if there was a core group of good people in the city, there was hope that they could influence others to repent from their wrongdoings and that the evil people would thereby eventually deserve to be saved.

This story teaches us just how important chesed is. Avraham went out of his way to try and save the evil people of Sodom with no incentive to do so. With that in mind, we too should recognize the significance of chesed and try to adopt it into our lives every day.

Don't Judge

Meira Salit ('24)

Imagine sitting outside in South Florida and all of a sudden three strangers stop by; what do you do? This is exactly what happened with Avraham, but of course not in South Florida. Avraham is known for his middot, especially the middah of hospitality, hachnasat orchim. He's the kind of person that rises to the occasion and always fulfills this important mitzvah.

Three days prior to the strangers showing up as guests of Avraham, he became the first Jew to have a brit milah, a big milestone in Jewish history. Keep in mind that he was 99 years old at this time. Hashem saw this and decided to give him a break from guests, but Avraham wouldn't have it. So, Avraham davened to Hashem for visitors. The Torah says:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל נָא תַעֲבֹר
מֵעַל עֲבָדְךָ

"And he said, my lords, if only I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass on from beside your servant" (Bereishit 18:3).

Avraham begs the wandering strangers, who we can assume to be nomads, to stay. Not only is he genuinely begging the strangers to stay, but he is not judging who they are or where they came from. Honestly, when's the last time anyone has begged strangers to stay at their house?

While researching for this dvar Torah, I came across this amazing story about Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, a famous Lithuanian and Belarusian Rabbi, Rosh Yeshiva, and posek, also known as the Even HaEzel.

The story goes as follows: Rabbi Meltzer was once sitting with a group of students when one of them looked out the window and announced that a leading Torah scholar was approaching. Rabbi Meltzer quickly prepared his modest Jerusalem apartment to greet the esteemed guest. In honor of the distinguished visitor, the table was set with a freshly laundered tablecloth and a bowl of fruit was placed on it. In addition, Rabbi Meltzer changed into his Shabbat attire to show respect. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Rabbi Meltzer rushed to the door to greet the honored guest. However, there was no grand rabbi. Instead, a simple Jew stood there and asked for a letter of approval to help raise funds. To the surprise of the visitor, Rabbi Meltzer ushered the man into his dining room, seated him at the head of the table, conversed with him, fed him, and gave him the respect he would have afforded a revered guest. After discussing the man's needs, Rabbi Meltzer wrote a letter brimming with powerful descriptions of the man and his situation. After the old Jew left, Rabbi Meltzer commented, "Who really knows how to evaluate the value of people? Perhaps this is the way one must treat every Jew. I was happy to channel my enthusiastic expectations of a great rabbi's visit toward this simple Jew."

What can we learn from all this? Just like Avraham and Rabbi Meltzer didn't judge by who or where their guests were from, neither should we.

Actions Count

Orly Dimont ('23)

Avraham and Sarah are the epitome of kindness. When we think of our first Jewish ancestors, we think of Avraham and Sarah bringing in guests and treating them with the utmost respect, but where was that kindness for Hagar? In last week's parsha, Sarah tells Avraham to have a child with her Egyptian servant, Hagar, since she (Sarah) is seemingly infertile. But once Hagar gets pregnant, Sarah becomes immediately jealous and is harsh to Hagar, ultimately causing her to run away. Hagar eventually comes back, but

only because an angel convinced her to. Did Hagar really deserve to be treated so badly?

When Yitzchak was born, Sarah banished Hagar and Yishmael because she didn't want Yitzchak to have to grow up or share his inheritance with Yishmael. According to some commentaries, banishing Hagar is one of Avraham's biggest sins. This sin directly correlates to the 400-year galut in Mitzrayim that Bnei Yisrael (his descendants) went through, which Hashem just told Avraham about in last week's parsha, Lech Lecha.

The first correlation is Hagar and Yishmael are wandering in the desert, just as Bnei Yisrael will do many years later after leaving Egypt. It is no coincidence that the desert is featured in both stories. Hashem tells Avraham that his children will be strangers in a foreign land. Hagar felt like a stranger in Avraham's house when Sarah was cruel to her. Lastly, both the Jewish nation and Hagar had a water crisis in the desert. Hagar ran out of water and cried out to save her son and Hashem saved him. The Jews faced a crisis when the water they drank tasted bitter. Hashem gave Moshe the ability to sweeten the water to make it drinkable. The Torah even uses the same words, **אל תיראו**, "do not fear", when Hashem goes to save them from dehydrating.

From this story and its parallels to Avraham's "sin" we learn that our forefathers aren't perfect and that we are meant to learn from their mistakes. We should learn to put ourselves in one another's shoes. When we don't truly think about others' feelings and how our actions affect each and every person around us, it can come back to haunt us later. Next time that you are about to do something that involves other people, think about their feelings too, as your actions can affect others.

Go the Distance

Binny Perl ('23)

As a high school student, I know the feeling of procrastination well. Every day I go home with an endless stream of work that I know needs to be done, but so often, I push it off, saying, "I'll do it later," when I know all too well that I won't. Procrastination is not easy to overcome, but perhaps we can turn to Avraham in this week's parsha for some inspiration.

There are three instances in Parshat Vayeira where Avraham doesn't procrastinate when given a chance. The first instance is with his three guests. Avraham,

who has just given himself a brit milah and is recovering, is in his tent when he sees three men coming towards him, and in an amazing act of kindness and hachnasat orchim, he jumps up and offers them food, drink, and a place to rest. Avraham was in tremendous pain, but nevertheless, he didn't waste an opportunity to do a mitzvah. Therefore he promptly welcomed these people into his home.

The second instance is when Avraham sends Yishmael and Hagar away. Yishmael was his only son at that point, a child whom he (Avraham) loved dearly. Avraham had hesitations and did not want to send Yishmael away, yet he doesn't procrastinate and listens to the words of his wife and Hashem.

Perhaps the most impressive instance is Akeidat Yitzchak. After the long-awaited birth of Yitzchak, Avraham is asked to offer him as a korban to Hashem. Avraham has faith in Hashem and, without asking any questions, he immediately takes Yitzchak up to Har HaMoriah, prepared to sacrifice his son.

Three times in this week's parsha, Avraham Avinu showed his amazing ability to not procrastinate and go through with something he did not want to do. While we are certainly not as great as Avraham and don't have his willpower, if he was willing to host guests while injured, send away one of his sons, and almost kill the other, we can certainly push ourselves to finish our work.

Meshugana Memes

Lot: "Those French Fries were real good. Where'd you get the salt?"

Abraham: "Haha... um..."



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