Ohr Somayach Light Lines

Light Insight

Getting the Job Done

"G-d appeared to him... while he was sitting in his tent in the heat of the day." (Genesis 18:1)

The Torah calls Noah a *tzadik*, a righteous person, and Abraham is called a *chasid,* a doer of loving-kindess. Abraham's appelation is clearly understood to describe a higher spiritual level than Noah's. How is a *chasid* greater than a *tzadik*? During the year that he spent in the ark while the flood raged on the face of the earth, Noah meticulously cared for the animals every day. However, if there had been an automatic feeding and waste disposal system available back then, he would have gladly installed it. It was important to Noah that the job get done, and he undertook great pains to see that the mammoth task was done well, but he would have been glad if that person weren't himself, ie. it's a dirty job. But someone has to do it. This is the definition of a *tzaddik,* someone who bends their will to do what is right, though the doing may not be their first desire.

Abraham was a *chasid,* a doer of loving-kindness. His attitude was: I want to do the *mitzva*, it's not enough that the job "get done." We see this clearly from the commentary of Rashi on the first verse of this week's portion: G-d made the day exceedingly hot so that no travelers should venture out and disturb Abraham on the third day after his circumcision, the most painful day of recovery.

However, <u>Abraham was more upset about not being able to do the mitzvah of welcoming guests than from the pain of the circumcision</u>! G-d saw that this was Abraham's major source of pain, and sent angels who looked like travelers so that Abraham could fulfill the mitzvah. This is the level of the *chasid* — he wants to do *chesed* (acts of loving-kindness), as our Sages teach us "the world will be built on *chesed.*"

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Why Not Egypt?

"*For the land which you come there to inherit is not like the land of Egypt from which you have gone out...*" (Deuteronomy 11:10)

Why was it necessary to take the Jews out of Egypt? G-d could simply have destroyed the Egyptians as punishment for their grave sins in enslaving and oppressing Israel and then given their land — a rich, fertile one — to His chosen people?

The answer is supplied in the contrast between Egypt and The Land of Israel described in the ensuing passages. Egypt is irrigated by the Nile once annually and does not depend on regular rainfall, while the Land of Israel depends on rain falling, a yardstick of Divine Providence. It is therefore not a land with just one annual "visit" of G-d, but "a land which G-d, seeks constantly, G-d's eyes are upon it from the beginning of the year until the end of the year." Thus it says that "if you will heed the mitzvos which I command you" that "I will give you the rain for your land in its time."

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The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

I work for a software company, and from time to time, I employ new programmers. One of my friends, an actuary, came to me one day, and said he was sick of actuarial work, and he wanted to get into programming. Knowing his potential, and wanting to do a good turn for a friend, I made special arrangements for him, gave him an interview with my boss and came to an agreement whereby he would start working for us at a very low rate, and when he had proved his worth he would be taken on as a full employee.

He worked for some time on this basis, and I believe he did prove his worth, but my boss was dragging his heels on giving him a formal job offer because of budget constraints. I encouraged my boss to make a formal offer, but he kept stalling.

One day, one of my colleagues came to me and said he had heard my friend talking to personnel agents on the telephone, in full earshot of the rest of the office, saying things like, "no, I don't want an actuarial job." I thought, well, I understand if he's annoyed at not getting an offer, and he wants to get a proper job somewhere else, but at least he could have told me he was unhappy. In any case, who else is going to give him the sort of opportunity we're giving him to learn on the job. So I asked him about it... and the truth came out:

He didn't initiate the calls to the personnel agents. He was so well qualified as an actuary, that the agents were headhunting him to place him in actuarial jobs and he was having to drive them away, because he was happy doing what he was doing! I communicated this to the people who had heard him talking, and not long afterwards, he got a formal job offer, and is now happily working for the company.

Response Line

Sol Harris wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
While looking at the Torah scroll, I have noticed that the top of most every section starts with the letter 'vav.' Is there a specific reason for this? Shalom.

Dear Sol,

It's no coincidence. Starting each column with the letter 'vav' is a custom some scribes follow when writing a Torah scroll. It is mentioned in the Zohar and the Code of Jewish Law.

As a prefix, the letter 'vav' means '**and**' — hence it is the letter of 'connection.' The 'vav' on top of each column hints to the Torah's unity. Torah is our 'connection' to the spiritual.

This custom is reminiscent of the courtyard surrounding the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) in the desert. Tapestries held in place by little hooks stretched from one upright column to another. The Hebrew word for a 'little hook' is 'vav'; hence, each 'column' had a 'vav' on top.

To jockey a letter 'vav' to the head of each column, scribes would sometimes ignore proper form and spacing, stretching letters or squishing them together. The result was not pretty, invalid, or both. For this reason, the *Semak* (13th century) and the *Mordechai* (1240-1298) wrote that they would like to abolish this custom.

Today, some scribes use computers to plan the layout of a beautiful, valid Torah scroll with a 'vav' on top of every column.