



Parshas Vayera

For the week ending 15 Cheshvan 5758
14 & 15 November 1997

Overview

Three days after performing *bris mila* on himself, Avraham Avinu is visited by Hashem. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will give birth to a son next year. Hashem reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. Hashem agrees that if there are fifty righteous men in Sodom, He will not destroy it. Avraham manages to "bargain" Hashem down to ten righteous men. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and Amora. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that, as a result of the destruction, there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk, and through him perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar, where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. At Hashem's command, on the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and her son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but Hashem tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and Hashem promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that Hashem is with him. In a tenth and final test, Hashem instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, Hashem sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, Hashem promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Parsha ends with genealogy and the birth of Rivka.

Insights

LEADING FROM BEHIND

"And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre" (18:1)

There are two ways you can lead an army. You can sit in a blockhouse buried hundreds of feet underground, 50 miles behind the lines and direct your troops, or you can be the first man over the top, leading your men into battle at the front.

When Hashem commanded Avraham to circumcise all his household, Avraham went to Avner and Eshcol to ask what he should do about those members of his household who didn't want to be circumcised. They didn't know what to answer him. Avraham then went to Mamre who told him that he should first circumcise himself and Yishmael. When the others would see this, they would allow themselves to be circumcised too.

And that is what Avraham did. First the Torah writes *"On that very day was Avraham circumcised with Yishmael, his son,"* and only then does the Torah write *"and all the people of his household."*

Ostensibly, Mamre's advice was unusual. Wouldn't it have been better for Avraham to preserve his strength and be circumcised last? In that way, he could have used his tremendously strong influence to persuade them. For it was Avraham's strength of speech alone that had brought so many under the wings of the Divine Presence. It was through the power of Avraham's persuasion, the power of the spoken word, that so many had converted.

Actions speak louder than words.

It would be well to remember that behaving like a *mensch* can bring someone close to the Torah more than thousands of words of intellectual proof.

If you want people to *follow*, you have to go first.

TURNING OVER

"And He (Hashem) overturned these cities and all the plain and all the dwellers of the cities and the vegetation of the earth." (19:25)

When we look at the situation today, it's easy to despair.

The strident metallic clang of materialism and selfishness seem to swamp out the message of the Torah and its People. The sensuous siren call of the media surrounds us all with a world whose reality is merely virtual.

Society at large seems almost deaf to morality, to modesty, to the values that are rooted in the Torah. The motto of the time is "Let it all hang out." In a world where there is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing brings shame, and thus anything is possible. And what is possible... happens.

Those who stand for the eternal values of our people are despised as fundamentalists and violent barbarians. Everything has been turned upside down.

There is a strange thread of history that runs from this week's *Parsha* down through the ages and climaxes in the end of history: Lot was rescued from the *overturning* of Sodom.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

©1997 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

972-2-581-0315

1-212-213-3100

1-905-886-5730

fax: 972-2-581-2890

fax: 1-212-213-8717

fax: 1-905-886-6065

ohr@virtual.co.il

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

Somayach@MSN.com

Dedication opportunities are available for Torah Weekly — Please contact us for details.

Parshas Vayera — 15 Cheshvan 5758, 14 & 15 November 1997

Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

Why specifically was it necessary to overturn Sodom? Why couldn't Sodom have just been destroyed with fire and brimstone. Wouldn't that be cataclysmic enough? What are we supposed to learn from the fact that Sodom was overturned?

After the destruction of Sodom, Lot's daughters thought that they were the only human survivors of what must have looked like a global nuclear holocaust. They surmised that the only way to perpetuate the human species was to cohabit with their father. The Torah, however, ascribes no blame to their actions as their motivation was pure.

From this incestuous union came a people called Moav — literally "from father." From Moav comes the prototypical convert, Ruth. From Ruth comes King David, and from King David comes the Mashiach. So it turns out that the foundation of Mashiach is ultimately in Sodom.

There are two ways that society's spiritual landscape can be changed. One way is by improving the situation bit by bit until the world is perfected. The other is that things get so bad that they cannot get any worse. At that point, everything reverses in an instant from the nadir to the zenith.

The prophets speak about the coming of Mashiach in terms of childbirth.

Someone ignorant of the process of childbirth who sees for the first time a woman in labor would be convinced that she is about to die. And the closer the actual moment of the birth, the stronger that impression would become.

And then, within a couple of minutes, seeming tragedy has turned into the greatest joy. A new life has entered the world.

Immediately prior to the coming of Mashiach there will be a tremendous confusion in the world. Everything will seem to have gone haywire. The natural order will be turned on its head. Age will bow to youth. Ugliness will be trumpeted as beauty, and what is beautiful will be disparaged as unattractive. Barbarism will be lauded as culture. And culture will be dismissed as worthless. The hunger of consumerism and the lust for material wealth will grow more and more, and it will find less and less to satisfy its voracity.

Eventually, materialism will grow so rapacious that it will become its own angel of death. It will literally consume itself and regurgitate itself back out.

But from this decay, the line of David will sprout, like vegetation that springs forth from no more than dirt and earth. *For vegetation cannot flourish unless the seed rots.* The second event is predicated on the first.

It's interesting to note that Mashiach is referred to as the "tzemach tzedek," literally the "righteous sprouting." For his coming is identical to the growth of vegetation. First total decay and only then new life.

This is the way Mashiach will come. The worse things become, the more painful the birth-pangs, the nearer is his coming. Until, like a mother who had delivered, all the tears and pain will be forgotten in the great joy of a new life.

Haftorah: Melachim II 3:1-37

RIGHTS AND DUTIES

It was not so long ago that the Torah was the only system in which a creditor has absolutely no rights over the physical person of a debtor. The spirit of the Torah insures a poor debtor against the unfeeling or inconsiderate use of a lien on the debtor's chattels. And even where the protection of the creditor stops, his obligation to love his fellow Jew — the debtor — begins. For we are all the children of Avraham and Sarah. Such is the *tzedaka* of Avraham, in contrast to the Sodomite insistence on the very last penny which can be wrung out through litigation.

INSPIRATION — THE BREATH OF LIFE

Just as in the *Parsha* where the angels promise Sarah that she will conceive and give birth to a child, in the Haftorah the prophet Elisha promises a barren Shunamite woman that she will give birth.

The child dies in his youth, and is resurrected by Elisha who revives him by placing himself on the lifeless child, implanting his own soul into the boy.

This is a lesson for all teachers: One has to in-spire — to breathe one's own life into one's pupils, to give over of one's own soul. Nothing less than this will do.

WOMEN OF KINDNESS

Just as Avraham and Sarah were both old and yet Hashem gave them a child, similarly in this week's Haftorah, Hashem grants the Shunamite woman and her husband a child.

Why then does the Haftorah begin with an entirely different miracle, that of the miraculous oil that filled pitcher after pitcher until the penniless widow of the prophet Ovadia became rich? What is the connection between these three women? The answer is that they all excelled in *chesed* — in kindness to others. To this day, Sarah is a role-model of the Jewish woman. Her life was an unceasing labor of welcoming guests and teaching them about Hashem. Ovadia's widow was also a heroine of *chesed* as depicted in the Haftorah, and the same was true of the Shunamite woman. All three cast the mold, the archetype of the Jewish woman for all generations.

Sources:

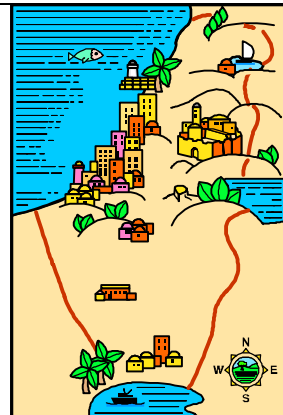
Leading From The Rear - Chidushei Halev

Turning Over - Ohr Yesharim; Rabbi Moshe Shapiro

Haftorah - Adapted from Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch and The Midrash Says

LOVE OF THE LAND

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



WHERE THE GOOD GOLD IS

One of the rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden is described as encircling *Eretz Yisrael* "where there is gold and the gold of that land is good." (*Bereishis* 2:11-12)

The gold here refers to the words of Torah which are more precious than gold itself. "The gold of that land is good" teaches us that there is no Torah like the Torah of *Eretz Yisrael* and no wisdom like the wisdom of *Eretz Yisrael*. (*Berishis Rabbah* 16:4)

Parshas Vayera

For the week ending 15 Cheshvan 5758, 14 & 15 November 1997

Torah Weekly is available from several sources:

- World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohr.org.il>
- Fax and Mail in Israel and US-MAIL in America. Send us a note requesting a subscription in Israel, or call 800-431-2272 in the US for details.
- E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub weekly {your full name}" to lstproc@virtual.co.il

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Do not let this land on a garbage heap.