

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYERA

Haftarah: Melachim II 4:1-23

NOVEMBER 4, 2017 15 HESHVAN 5778

Remember to move your clocks back one hour on Saturday night.

DEDICATION: LeRefuah Shelemah Elisheva Bat Esther

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

**NOW Mincha and Arbit - Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979
 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4:00PM – Please
 join us! 212-289-2100 – Mincha followed by Arbit – Give us 18
 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!**

EDITORS NOTES

Over the last few days, we have been trying to understand our great great grandfather Lot, although as his great granddaughter Ruth converted and in doing so became a child of Abraham and Sarah, perhaps she disconnected us from her ancestors all the way back to Lot.

Was Lot a good guy or a bad guy? It's a difficult question to answer and the answer may not be so simple.

Lot followed his uncle Abraham and joined him on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When Abraham took refuge from the famine in Egypt, Lot held his tongue and kept silent. Remember Lot could have explained that he was in fact Sarah's brother who would negotiate the dowry and toss Abraham under the bus, but he didn't. When the two angels disguised as men arrive in Sodom, it is Lot who greets them and risks his life by offering them hospitality. Many question his offer to them in comparison to Abraham's invitation. Abraham invites them to wash, have a bite and stay as long as they like, while Lot invites them to spend one night, then wash and suggests they leave early. And Lot has good reason to change things up. If they are caught and they have not yet washed, Lot can claim they just arrived. Leaving early might allow the entire night to pass without event. Abraham offers a huge meal which was the custom at mid-day. Lot offers a light supper which was the custom at night. Lot puts himself and his entire family in tremendous danger in hopes of emulating his uncle Abraham.

In what merit was Lot saved? Perhaps he was saved because of the merit of Abraham. Perhaps it was in placing his own life at risk for doing kindness to others as we learn Sedakah Tasil MeMavet – Charitable acts save one from death. Perhaps silence

truly is golden and it was his silence in Egypt which saved him. Or perhaps it was the souls of King David and the Mashiach which he carried which provided the spark for Lot to do good leading to his survival.

Still Lot does things which are difficult to understand. Abraham asks him to separate from him after their return to Egypt and Lot's eyes choose Sodom because it is like Egypt. On the simplest level as the Nile watered and nourished Egypt, the Jordan watered and nourished the valley. Perhaps the appeal to his eyes was in the similarity of a dark and immoral Egypt which could be found in Sodom.

And try as we do, offering explanation after explanation, we cannot fathom how Lot could offer his own virgin daughters to the people of Sodom to do with as they like in order to protect his guests. How do words like these come out of any father's mouth? He learned that hospitality was important in Abraham's house, but failed to understand. We could only imagine a comparison with a child who is instructed to do something and when frustrated by near failure breaks all accepted rules to complete the task and then says, "but you told me to do it". It's as if the lessons of Abraham were never internalized and simply remained externalized as rote actions without understanding.

And finally, although his daughter's meant well thinking that mankind had been destroyed and repopulating the world was their responsibility, how does Lot allow himself to get drunk to the point he wouldn't realize what was happening? And even if we give him the benefit of the doubt on the first night, justifying the second night is a thousand times more difficult. There must have been a very dark shadow within him.

And what's stranger yet is that Moab and Amon who came to this world in the merit of hospitality show the opposite trait to the children of Abraham four centuries later as the Israelites depart Egypt. The Mashiah may have been hiding within Moab and Amon, but Lot seems to have done very little to coax him out. It would be almost a thousand years later when the sparks would begin to be revealed through Ruth and Boaz and Naamah and Solomon. In fact with the pregnancy of his daughters, Lot seems to

disappear from the stage of life. In the end, Lot seems to have failed.

I imagine he realized his mistake, he admitted, he regretted and committed himself to never repeat it. And perhaps he died with that regret, but unable to prove himself. Perhaps Hashem in his mercy allowed a part of Lot to return in the body of Boaz and perhaps a part of Lot's eldest daughter returned in Ruth. And perhaps the night when Ruth comes to Boaz on the field after he's worked and eaten and had his fill of wine is that chance to either repeat the sin or exercise self-control. Perhaps each passing hour under the moonlight of that night was a test beyond anything we could imagine as success would lead to the birth of the Mashiach and failure to the unimaginable.

Lot is an interesting character. Does he deserve criticism or praise? Is he good or is he bad?

I believe that Lot, the nephew of Abraham, the father of Mashiach is both and deserves both. It's scary to think about, but perhaps Lot is just like all of us fighting the battle each day. We too often judge people too quickly and we don't see ourselves too clearly!

Life's not easy, but nobody told us it would be.

But if and when we succeed, the reward is immeasurable.

Let's all fight to succeed.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

There are 3 words in this week's parasha that really made an impression on me. The words are "ha'yipaleh me'Hashem davar"! Hashem asks Abraham why Sara laughed when she heard she was going to have a baby. Hashem says ha'yipaleh me'Hashem davar, is there anything that is beyond my capability! Is there anything that I can't do that she is doubting that I can give her a baby at her old age. After all, Hashem created the sun, moon, stars. He runs the world and everything in it. He can perform the most amazing miracle with the greatest of ease. To give Sara a baby is nothing for him. When we are in a tough situation it is nice idea to try and remember these words. Ha'yipaleh me'Hashem davar. Is there anything Hashem can't do. He can't find a solution for my little problem no matter how big it may seem in my eyes. We have to remember that

no matter how hopeless or desperate a situation may seem, it is nothing for Hashem. He can solve my problem with ease. Ha'yipaleh me'Hashem davar!!

Va'yera - Sedom is destroyed, Akedat Yitshak
1- 3 malachim come to visit Abraham. Abraham feeds them. Sara hears that she will have a baby.
2- Abraham hears Sedom will be destroyed and pleads with Hashem to spare them
3- The malachim come to save Lot
4- Sedom is destroyed. Abimelech takes Sara. Yitshak is born.
5- Abraham sends away Yishmael and Hagar
6- Abraham and Abimelech make a peace treaty
7- Akedat Yitshak

Some interesting/important Rashis to see in Parashat Va'yera - Final

18:24/26/28/29- Sedom was a metropolis made up of 5 cities*** (when Abraham said if there are 40 sadikim...he was suggesting that if there is there are 10 sadikim in each of 4 cities so save those four cities and only destroy one city. And so too when he asked if there were 30, 20, or 10 sadikim. He was asking Hashem if he could at least save three, two, or one city in Sedom).

19:20- Sedom was destroyed 52yrs after dor ha'haflaga

20:1a- Why Abraham left Hebron. Abraham stopped getting visitors after sedom was destroyed

21:34a- The life and travels of Abraham**

22:11a- What the connotation is when the pasook says Abraham's name twice (Note: This is a general Klal. Saying a person's name twice is a lashon of love).

22:20a/23a - Why are the pesookim telling us about the descendants of Nachor here. (Note, this is an important pasook because Rashi learns from here that Rivka was born at this point when Yitshak did akedat Yitshak. That makes Yitshak 37yrs old than Rivka).**

Important dates

Perek 12, Pasook 5 – The pasook says “Abram was 75 when he left Haran (when Hashem told him lech lecha)”

Perek 16, Pasook 16 – The pasook says “Abraham was 86yrs old when Hagar gave birth to Yishmael”

Perek 17, Pasook 25&26 – The pasook says “Abraham was 99 when he did brit milah” and “Yishmael was 13 when he did brit milah”

Parashat Va'yera

Perek 21, Pasook 5- The pasook says “Abraham was 100yrs old when Yitshak was born”

Perek 22, Pasook 23- The pasook tells us of the birth of Rivka. Rashi learns this occurred just after the events of akedat Yitshak.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do?" (Beresheet 18:17)

Hashem revealed to Abraham His plan to destroy Sedom. In the previous verses the Torah describes to us the great hospitality Abraham showed the three angels. Immediately after the episode of the angels, the Torah gives the details of the wickedness of the people of Sedom. The biggest crime in Sedom was to be hospitable to wayfarers. We are then told about the heartfelt prayers of Abraham to save them.

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l, in his sefer Emet Le'Yaakov explains that the Torah is giving us a huge message, by contrasting the story of Abraham and the angels and then telling us about Abraham praying for Sedom. Human nature is that when someone is very meticulous in the performance of a certain misvah, he looks in disdain at anyone who shrugs off the importance of that misvah. Rabbi Yaakov gives an example of a person who is very careful with the misvah of Seudah Shelishit; he cannot tolerate someone who fulfills the misvah with just eating fruit. Especially since Abraham was the pillar of hessed, so much so that he considered doing the misvah of Berit Milah in private, so as not to take away from the attribute of hessed of Hashem, nevertheless he prayed so earnestly that he had to ask Hashem not to be angry at him for pushing so hard. This is the lesson the Torah wants to teach us, the pure trait of hessed that Abraham possessed. Abraham's kindness was based on his love for other people, not to show his greatness.

Rav Yaakov, in a footnote, adds that we know from many Midrashic sources, that Abraham dedicated his life to hessed. However, the Torah doesn't explicitly mention this anywhere in the Torah. The only place the Torah mentions Abraham's kindness is by the story of the three angels. The reason is to show the contrast between his trait of hessed and the complete opposite of the people of Sedom. Nevertheless, he didn't hold himself back from praying for them simply because they were the creations of Hashem. We now have a clear picture of Abraham's hessed.

Maybe this will help us relate properly to all people. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And Yitzhak said to Abraham, 'Where is the sheep for the sacrifice?'" (Beresheet 22:7) The Midrash tells us that Abraham and Yitzhak both went out to do the Akedah (Binding on the Altar) with the same zeal, love and dedication. The Satan, attempting to prevent them from doing this great misvah, came up with many arguments, all in vain. Then the Satan turned to Yitzhak and said to him that all of his prized possessions would go to Yishma'el,

his half brother, if he let himself be sacrificed. It says in the Midrash that at that point, Yitzhak hesitated, and that's when he asked his father, "Where is the sheep for the sacrifice?"

We see from here a powerful lesson. All other arguments were not able to penetrate Yitzhak and prevent him from his self-sacrifice, but when he realized he would lose his possessions to his brother, that was enough to make him stop for a moment. The power of jealousy, of someone else taking from me is such that even a perfectly righteous person, such as Yitzhak Abinu could be affected, even momentarily. We see many incidents where friends, partners, brothers and families are torn apart because of this kind of jealousy. We become blinded by our interpretation of the facts, and we don't hear the other side or acknowledge that we could be wrong! The only way to view the situation objectively is through a third party who is neutral and has no personal considerations. The fact that our forefather, Yitzhak, was able to overcome his hesitation and do the Akedah shows that we have it within us to rise above jealousy and pettiness. If we look for the truth, Hashem will help us find it. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

The Other Side of the Desk

Parents and children. Employer and employee. Husband and wife. People may share an environment, yet they very often don't see eye to eye.

Some people repeat questions over and over, and no matter how many ways you try to explain what they need to know, they just don't get it. Frustration with others may even get worse if they are elderly or infirm, and move or speak slowly. Dealing with another's shortcomings is a test of your tolerance and patience.

Actually, how you feel about other people is really only a matter of perspective.

An employer had a personnel problem with one of his employees. He tried to explain management's position to the disgruntled worker from several different angles, yet the employee stood firm. Finally, the employer said, "Why don't you come and sit here in my chair, and I will come out from behind my desk and sit in yours."

Actually, how you feel about other people is really only a matter of perspective.

An employer had a personnel problem with one of his employees. He tried to explain management's position to the disgruntled worker from several different angles, yet the employee stood firm. Finally, the employer said, "Why don't you come and sit here in my chair, and I will come out from behind my desk and sit in yours."

Unexplainably, as soon as they had changed sides, the employer's point of view started to become

clear to the employee. It was only a matter of perspective.

The great sage, Hillel, stated (Abot 2:4): Do not judge your friend until you are in his place. Should someone get on your nerves, come out from behind your desk and sit in his chair. Put yourself in his head and consider his motivation and situation. It is a healthy change in perspective that will develop your patience and your understanding. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list
If you want to receive this article every week,
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

Rabbi Wein

THE VANISHING AMERICAN TRADITIONAL JEW

The Jewish community in the United States has changed dramatically over the last sixty years. A trip down nostalgia lane will reveal that the backbone of the Jewish community in the United States then was the traditional Jew. That Jew did not attend synagogue services often but was somehow vaguely familiar with the prayer service itself. He or she was not strictly observant of the laws of Judaism by any measure of observance but retained a connection to that observance by eating matzo on Pesach, lighting Sabbath candles on Friday night and eating food that had some relationship to being kosher.

That Jew was fiercely loyal to and proud of the fledgling State of Israel and voted on the narrow issue of "is it good for the Jews?" That Jew was still scarred by the economic ravages of the Great Depression. He was determined to give his children a college education, a degree that would guarantee them a profession and a haven of economic security.

That Jew was not wealthy by today's standards but strove to be part of the emerging middle class, to own a home and an automobile. That Jew was a strong supporter of the then American public school system and hoped that their children would be able to integrate themselves fully into the general American society, without having to intermarry and assimilate completely.

Their children were given a minimalist Jewish education in afternoon or Sunday Hebrew schools that, at most, led to their Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremonies. It was better than nothing but only barely so

Most of these were second or third generation

Americans, descended from Orthodox Eastern European parents and grandparents. Though they may have loved and cherished their ancestors, they were determined not to be like them in appearance, language and way of life. These traditional Jews became the constituency of the Conservative movement of twentieth century American Jewish life.

Unwilling to commit to the radicalism of Reform but equally unwilling or unable to adjust to a fully observant Jewish lifestyle, the Conservative movement became their logical and comfortable home. Though it made few actual ritual demands upon its members, the Conservative movement still retained the flavor of traditional Jewish life and values.

Israel and the Holocaust were the main tenets of its approach to traditional Jewish life and its mission. But as the decades passed these issues receded and faded. In the eyes of many, especially on the Left, Israel was too strong and Germany was no longer considered to be a pariah state.

The children and grandchildren of the old traditional American Jew fought for universal causes and slowly but surely drifted away from any meaningful connection to the Jewish people or to the value system and lifestyle of Judaism itself.

Intermarriage became rampant and complete alienation from Jewish causes and the State of Israel became the norm of the new generation of American Jews. This new American Jew was completely ignorant of his faith and heritage, knew not the history of his or her people and began to internalize the narratives of the enemies of the Jewish people and the Jewish state. This type of Jew became the subtle enemy of his or her own people and self.

All of this was recognized on the ground by the slow but steady erosion of the Conservative movement in American Jewish society. In many respects, it lost its traditional moorings and became only a pale shadow of Reform. The influence of the increasingly hedonistic and loosened bonds of general American culture wreaked havoc among the children of its base constituency.

They were no longer interested in any form of Jewish worship services, no matter how many guitars now accompanied the prayer services. The universal had conquered the particular and the fuzzy ideas of utopianism replaced the hard-core concepts of basic morality that lie at the heart of Jewish thought and social life.

In this atmosphere of blissful ignorance and befuddled goals, support for all Jewish causes declined and loyalty to the State of Israel, as the great accomplishment of the previous century, weakened dramatically. The traditional American Jew of the twentieth century had no descendants and hence no future as well.

It is most unlikely that this tragedy can be averted and reversed in our lifetimes though as a nation we are well accustomed to unforeseen events and miraculous deliverances. The prediction of the past, that in Judaism it is either all or nothing at all, appears to be ominously accurate as far as American Jewry is concerned currently

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com
Breaking Our Nature

We read in Parashat Vayera the famous story known as "Akedat Yishak," where G-d commanded Abraham Abinu to offer his son, Yishak, as a sacrifice. This story begins by telling us that G-d "tested Abraham," to see the extent of his devotion to Hashem's commands. Just as Abraham drew the sword to sacrifice his son, an angel appeared to Abraham and told him not to proceed with the slaughter, as this was merely a test.

The question arises as to why this command was a test for Abraham Abinu, but not for Yishak. According to tradition, Yishak was 37 years old at the time of Akedat Yishak. He was not a young boy forced into this by his father. Wasn't this a test for him, as well? Why is Akedat Yishak presented as a test for Abraham, but not for Yishak?

One explanation is that this was a test specifically for Abraham because he had arrived at the belief in G-d on his own through logical reasoning. In a world that believed in idols, Abraham, in his profound wisdom and intelligence, recognized through logic that there must be a single Creator. Abraham's great test was fulfilling G-d's command that seemed wholly illogical. G-d had earlier promised to produce a great nation from Yishak, and now he tells him to kill him. This obviously defied all logic, and thus naturally challenged Abraham's entire approach, of arriving at belief through logic. His obedience to the divine command demonstrated that he was committed to G-d not only when logic dictated following His laws, but even when His laws seem illogical.

But there is also another reason why this test was unique to Abraham. The Vilna Gaon taught that a

person's task in this world is to overcome his innate negative tendencies. We are to identify our areas of personal weakness and work toward improving ourselves in those very areas. Thus, for example, a person who is naturally a glutton and enjoys overindulging in food should focus the bulk of his attention on moderating his food intake. A person who is by nature short-tempered has the responsibility of fighting against this tendency and being patient and tolerant of other people. We are not here to just accept our nature, to resign ourselves to the character flaws with which we are created. Rather, our main job during our lifetime is to break our nature, to perfect the flawed areas of our personalities.

Abraham, as we know, was naturally kind and generous. His outstanding quality was Hesed, as expressed by his hospitality, and in his impassioned plea on behalf of the wicked city of Sedom. He naturally loved and cared for all people. The test of Akedat Yishak required Abraham to go against that natural instinct in the most extreme way possible. There is nothing more cruel and heartless than killing one's own son. The command of Akedat Yishak was necessary for Abraham to show that he was prepared to obey G-d's commands even when they directly opposed his most basic natural instincts. And thus the Midrash comments that if Abraham had not passed this test, the tenth and final test to which G-d subjected him, all the previous nine tests would not have counted. This test was necessary to show that he was devoted to G-d no matter what this entailed, no matter how strongly he was naturally disinclined to obey His command.

This insight into the Akeda is relevant to many different areas of life. We have a natural tendency not to admit to making a mistake, to always insisting that we are correct. In marriage, especially, this natural instinct must be broken. Marriage requires us to hear another perspective and admit when it is more correct than ours, something which is very difficult to do because it goes against one of our most basic, natural tendencies. We also have a natural tendency during periods of stress and anxiety to blurt out hurtful and damaging remarks. This tendency, too, must be broken for our marriage and other relationships to succeed.

The story of Akedat Yishak teaches us that we can and must break natural negative tendencies. There is no such thing as "It's too hard, this is just the way I am." If this is the way we are, then our job is precisely to change that very nature. If a man as kind as Abraham could obey God's command to slaughter his son, then certainly we can break our natural

instincts toward anger, obstinacy, and so on. To the contrary, this is precisely why we are here – to correct those natural tendencies, to improve the flawed areas of our characters, to continuously work towards rising closer to perfection.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Space Between Us

The stories told in Bereishit chapters 21 and 22 – the sending away of Ishmael and the binding of Isaac – are among the hardest to understand in the whole of Tanakh. Both involve actions that strike us as almost unbearably harsh. But the difficulties they present go deeper even than that.

Recall that Abraham was chosen “so that he would instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” He was chosen to be a father. The first two letters of his name, Av, mean just that. Avram means “a mighty father.” Avraham, says the Torah, means “a father of many nations.”

Abraham was chosen to be a parental role model. But how can a man who banished his son Ishmael, sending him off with his mother Hagar into the desert, where they nearly died, be thought of as an exemplary father? And how could a man who was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac be a model for future generations?

These are not questions about Abraham. They are questions about the will of God. For it was not Abraham who wanted to send Ishmael away. To the contrary, it “distressed Abraham greatly,” because Ishmael was his son (Gen. 21:11). It was God who told him to listen to Sarah and send the child away.

Nor was it Abraham who wanted to sacrifice Isaac. It was God who told him to do so, referring to Isaac as “your son, your only one, the one you love” (Gen. 22:2). Abraham was acting on both occasions against his emotions, his paternal instincts. What is the Torah telling us about the nature of fatherhood? It seems very difficult indeed to draw a positive message from these events.

There is an even deeper problem, and it is hinted at in the words God spoke to Abraham in summoning him to the binding of his son: “Take your son, your only son, the one you love—Isaac—and go [lekh lekha] to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” These words inevitably remind us of God’s first summons: “Go forth [lekh lekha] from your land, your birthplace and your father’s house” (Gen. 12:1). These are the

only two places in which this phrase occurs in the Torah. Abraham’s last trial echoed his first.

But note that the first trial meant that Abraham had to abandon his father, thereby looking as if he were neglecting his duties as a son.[1] So, whether as a father to his sons or as a son to his father, Abraham was commanded to act in ways that seem the exact opposite of what we would expect and how we should behave.

This is too strange to be accidental. There is a mystery here to be decoded.

The barrier to our understanding of these events lies in the sheer abyss of time between then and now. Abraham, as the pioneer of a new kind of faith and way of life, was instituting a new form of relationship between the generations. Essentially, what we are seeing in these events is the birth of the individual.

In ancient times, and in antiquity in Greece and Rome, the basic social unit was not the individual but the family. Religious rituals were performed around the fire in the family hearth, with the father serving as priest, offering sacrifices, libations and incantations to the spirits of dead ancestors. The power of the father was absolute. Wives and children had no rights and no independent legal personalities. They were mere property and could be killed by the head of the household at will. Each family had its own gods, and the father was the sole intermediary with the ancestral spirits, whom he would one day join. There were no individuals in the modern sense. There were only families, under the absolute rule of its male head.

The Torah was a radical break with this entire mindset. The anthropologist Mary Douglas points out that the Torah was unique in the ancient world in making no provision for sacrifices to dead ancestors, and forbidding the attempt to communicate with the spirits of the dead.[2]

Monotheism was more than simply the belief in one God. Because each human was in His image, and because each could be in direct relationship with Him, the individual was suddenly given significance – not just fathers but also mothers, and not just parents but also children. No longer were they fused into a single unit, with a single controlling will. They were each to become persons in their own right, with their own identity and integrity.[3]

Such changes do not happen overnight, and they do not happen without wrenching dislocations. That is what is happening at both ends of the Abraham story.

At the beginning of his mission, Abraham was told to separate himself from his father, and towards the end he was told to separate himself, in different ways, from each of his two sons. These painful episodes represent the agonising birth-pangs of a new way of thinking about humanity.

First separate, then connect. That seems to be the Jewish way. That is how God created the universe, by first separating domains – day and night, upper and lower waters, sea and dry land – then allowing them to be filled. And that is how we create real personal relationships. By separating and leaving space for the other. Parents should not seek to control children. Spouses should not seek to control one another. It is the carefully calibrated distance between us in which relationship allows each party to grow.

In his recent book on sporting heroes, *The Greatest*, Matthew Syed notes how important the encouragement of parents is to the making of champions, but he adds:

Letting go – that is the essential paradox of parenthood. You care, you nurture, you sacrifice, and then you watch as the little ones fly into the great unknown, often shouting recriminations as they depart. You will experience the stomach clenching pain of separation, but you do so with a smile and a hug, aware that the desire to protect and love must never morph into the tyranny of mollycoddling.[4]

It is this drama of separation that Abraham symbolically enacts in his relationship both to his father and to his two sons. In this world-transforming moment of the birth of the individual, God is teaching him the delicate art of making space, without which no true individuality can grow.

In the lovely words of Irish poet John O'Donohue our challenge is: "To bless the space between us." [5]

[1] See Rashi to Gen. 11:32.

[2] Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

[3] See Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Doubleday, 1967, 117 where he speaks of "the highly individuated men" (and women) who "populate the pages of the Old Testament to a degree unique in ancient religious literature."

[4] Matthew Syed, *The Greatest: the quest for sporting perfection*, London, John Murray, 2017, 9.

[5] John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us*, Doubleday, 2008

Rav Kook on the Perasha

The depravity of the inhabitants of Sodom was so monstrous that it was beyond all hope of reformation. God decreed that the city needed to be destroyed.

Angels were sent to save Lot's family — not in their own merit, but for Abraham's sake. The rescuers warned Lot and his family not to watch as the city was leveled. Unfortunately, Lot's wife did look back, and was turned into a pillar of salt.

Why did Lot's wife need to pay such a heavy price for her curiosity? Why wasn't Lot's family allowed to observe the destruction?

The Misguided and the Incurrable: Just as there are levels in righteousness, so too there are levels in wickedness. Some unscrupulous individuals are in fact good people who came under the influence of unprincipled friends and a milieu of crime and corruption. These misguided individuals are receptive to change. If they witness the just punishment of the wicked, their innate goodness is awakened, and they are encouraged to return to the proper path.

On the other hand, some people are so incurably evil — psychopaths and hardened criminals, for example — that they cannot be helped. The only thing restraining their evil excesses is fear of punishment. This was the state of the residents of Sodom, who were perfectly comfortable with their evil ways.

When the incurably wicked witness the downfall of evil, it has the reverse effect on them. It actually reduces the fear that holds their vices in check, since imagined punishment is more frightening than the real thing. When they observe havoc and devastation, they become less inhibited and pose an even greater menace to society.

Lot's Wife: Lot's family did not deserve to be saved. They lacked moral resolve, and were drawn to the malevolent and degenerate ways of their evil neighbors. Only fear of Divine retribution kept their immoral tendencies in check.

Lot's family was commanded not to watch the destruction, in order to maintain their fear of God's justice. This fear was the only means by which they could escape the influence of Sodom. When Lot's wife willfully looked back, she lost some of her fear of judgment. She became like the other residents of Sodom, who were destroyed because they were irredeemably corrupt. Lot's wife shared the severe punishment of her fellow Sodomites — "brimstone and salt." She too was turned into an inert pillar of salt, an apt symbol of her immutable and irreparable state of evil.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 250)

Rabbi Meyer Laniado The Journey of Abraham

A fruit will ripen at its proper time; we cannot force it to ripen early. We should not get upset that the fruit has not ripened. Its time simply has not yet come. Sometimes we get frustrated at our current state in life and wonder why things just are not working out. We have been working hard for a long time, and yet not much seems to be happening. This can be discouraging, but we must realize that life is a process, and we should allow for the process.

Abraham Abinu did not immediately know that there was a God. When he was three years old[1], he began to explore and think. He would ponder day and night: "how is it possible for the planet to continue to revolve if there is no one controlling it? Who is the one causing it to revolve?" Abraham had no one to teach or guide him. He had no connections; it was pure hard work and patience.

Everyone around him believed in mythology and idolatry, yet, he began his journey to gain understanding. He must have been mocked by those around him who did not understand why he was questioning 'the obvious and accepted,' 'the way it has always been.' It was not until thirty-seven years later when he was forty years old that he came to recognize that there was a single creator of the universe: God. Even then, he did not speak to God for another thirty years, when He appeared to him at the age of seventy[2]!

Abraham did not give up; he kept searching, questioning, and working to find the answer. It took him not one or two years, but thirty-seven. Abraham followed God's instructions and left Haran on a journey to an unknown place at the age of seventy-five. This is a bold change for a man of seventy-five to make. Most people of that age will not make such life changing decisions, heading down a new career path, one fraught with uncertainty and insecurity. That is why this was one of the ten trials[3]. It is never easy to start life anew.

Abraham was promised a great nation but had not had any success in producing an heir with his wife, Sarah. Many years had passed, and Abraham held onto his hope. It was not Abraham who sought another woman to conceive with, it was Sarah who gave him Hagar to conceive with. Hagar conceived and bore Abraham his first child, Yishmael, when Abraham was eighty-six years old. It was another thirteen years[4] after the birth of Yishmael that Sarah bore Yishaq. Can you imagine the wait of thirty years for your wife to conceive a child? Abraham never

gave up hope! He rejoiced upon the news that now, finally, he would have a child who would continue his legacy[5].

These are only two examples of the trials Abraham faced on his life journey. He also experienced famine, forcing him to leave the land he was promised, he had his wife taken from him twice. The first his wife was taken by the Pharaoh of Egypt and second by the King of Gerar. His nephew Lot was taken captive by a powerful army, forcing Abraham to gather his troops and go to war on Lot's behalf. Abraham also had to send away his first born son Yishmael, which pained him greatly[6]. These trials would cause anyone to lose sight of their goal and surrender. Abraham faced these challenges and grew from them. They raised him up as, making him the banner whose lead we follow.

Yishaq as well had a hard time conceiving children with his wife, Ribqa. After ten years of trying to have kids, Yishaq neither gave up nor did he try to force the process. He did his best and turned to God for help, being faithful to the process and trusting in God. He knew that a great nation would come from him as both he and his father Abraham were promised.

Our hopes and our dreams may seem distant and out of reach, maybe even impossible. We should not give up but keep moving forward and striving, recognizing that life is a process and a journey. Abraham is now known as our forefather and model of our nation. We view him as a pillar, and his values of hakhnasat orhim and sedaqa umishpat are imbued within us. We need to keep in mind that Abraham Abinu was not born Abraham Abinu. He was born Abram, and through a desire to grow and develop he took steps towards his goal. Sometimes, it seemed bleak and unachievable. Years and years went by with no development or change, and then, finally, it started to come together.

Even at the age of forty, the point that Abraham came to an understanding of God, he had not yet communicated with God. It would take him an additional thirty years. Finally, when God spoke to him, He told him he would have a great nation. Abram waited decades until he bore a son who would continue his legacy, and at that stage, at the age of one hundred, he was instructed to sacrifice that son! Abraham still did not lose hope and continued on the path.

We will come across numerous road blocks, and we will be told that it will never happen. We may even be told that we are not good enough and do not have the right skills, experience, or knowledge. The way to

succeed is to keep progressing, realizing that we are currently where we are supposed to be, and as the fruit goes through stages in its ripening process, so too will we. We should not allow ourselves to be picked off the tree before we are ready. Hang on, keep heading on the journey, and take one step at a time until finally, you are ripe and ready.

[1] tBavli Nedarim 32 and Rambam Hilkhoh Aboda Zara 1:9

[2] Based on Rambam Hilkhoh Aboda Zara 1. There is a dispute about the ages. Abraham Zacuto in The Book of Lineage elaborates

[3] Rambam's comment on Mishna Abot 5:3

[4] Abraham was 99

[5] Note Onqelos and Rashi Beresheit 17:17

[6] Beresheit 21:11

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
“And he said: My masters, if I find favor in your eyes, please do not pass away from your servant” (18:3)

In order to gain their consent, Abraham honored them and he lowered his own dignity. Abraham was important. He was wealthy (13:2). He had 318 men of war (14:14), he had gained a great victory (14:15), and he had been visited by prophecies from G-d. And he would have been justified in considering himself as a man of illustrious dignity. He had no foreknowledge of the nature of the wayfarers. And no matter how important they might have been, yet no one deserved that Abraham should run to greet them and bow down and entreat them to partake of hospitality, and call them “my masters”, while Abraham termed himself “your servant”.

Sometimes the question is asked: Why is the fundamental principle of good traits of character not mentioned in the Torah?

Actually it is an explicit command reiterated in numerous instances of varied nature. But here the Torah dilates at great length on a model of behavior which serves as a source of numerous lessons in desirable traits of character. The description of Abraham's conduct in this unusually detailed portion emphasizes by its lengthiness and by its explicitness how much weight G-d puts on the subject of kindness together with humility.

It is certain that had we been present we would have considered Abraham's behavior as excessive. The deeds of the very great men are considered irrational by men of lesser stature (see 18:1, 24:20).

“The man of the Spirit is a madman” (Hoshea 9:7) in the eyes of others. Quoted from “The Beginning” By R' Miller ZT'L