

Parshas Vayeira in a Nutshell
(Genesis 18:1–22:24)

G-d reveals Himself to Abraham three days after the first Jew's circumcision at age ninety-nine; but Abraham rushes off to prepare a meal for three guests who appear in the desert heat. One of the three — who are angels disguised as men — announces that, in exactly one year, the barren Sarah will give birth to a son. Sarah laughs.

Abraham pleads with G-d to spare the wicked city of Sodom. Two of the three disguised angels arrive in the doomed city, where Abraham's nephew Lot extends his hospitality to them and protects them from the evil intentions of a Sodomite mob. The two guests reveal that they have come to overturn the place, and to save Lot and his family. Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt when she disobeys the command not to look back at the burning city as they flee.

While taking shelter in a cave, Lot's two daughters (believing that they and their father are the only ones left alive in the world) get their father drunk, lie with him and become pregnant. The two sons born from this incident father the nations of Moab and Ammon.

Abraham moves to Gerar, where the Philistine king Abimelech takes Sarah—who is presented as Abraham's sister—to his palace. In a dream, G-d warns Abimelech that he will die unless he returns the woman to her husband. Abraham explains that he feared he would be killed over the beautiful Sarah.

G-d remembers His promise to Sarah, and gives her and Abraham a son, who is named Isaac.

(continued next column)

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(Yitzchak, meaning “will laugh”). Isaac is circumcised at the age of eight days; Abraham is one hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, at their child's birth.

Hagar and Ishmael are banished from Abraham's home and wander in the desert; G-d hears the cry of the dying lad, and saves his life by showing his mother a well. Abimelech makes a treaty with Abraham at Beersheba, where Abraham gives him seven sheep as a sign of their truce.

G-d tests Abraham's devotion by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem. Isaac is bound and placed on the altar, and Abraham raises the knife to slaughter his son. A voice from heaven calls to stop him; a ram, caught in the undergrowth by its horns, is offered in Isaac's place. ❖

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Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – Nov 4 / Cheshvan 19

Candle Lighting5:32 pm
Mincha5:35 pm

Shabbos Day –Nov 5 / Cheshvan 20

Shacharis9:30 am*
Torah Reading10:45 am
Kiddush.....12:10 pm
Bais Midrash 4:30 pm
Mincha5:30 pm
Rabbi's Drasha.....5:50 pm
Shabbos Ends6:31 pm

**The latest time for saying the morning Shema is now 10:02 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri)6:15 am
Shacharis (Sunday) 9:00 am
Mincha (Sun-Thurs).....1:45 pm
Maariv (Sun-Thurs)9:15 pm

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5:55 am, followed
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Halachic Zmanim

Shabbos, Nov 5, 2023
Eastern Daylight Time

Earliest Tallis.....6:32 AM
Latest Morning Shema ...10:02 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola).. 1:06 PM
Plag Hamincha..... 4:48 PM
Earliest Evening Shema 6:18 PM

Chassidic Masters

The Natural Jew

*Based on the teachings of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe.*

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*And G-d revealed Himself to
[Abraham], in the Plains of Mamre,
as he sat in the doorway of his tent
in the heat of the day.*

-- Genesis 18:1

*It was the third day following
Abraham's circumcision, and G-d
came to visit him to fulfill the
mitzvah of visiting the sick.*

*-- Rashi on verse;
Talmud, Bava Metzia 86b*

In 1798, the founder of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, was arrested on charges of treason against the Czar and imprisoned in the Peter-Paul Fortress, situated on an island in the Neva River in Petersburg. During his 53-day imprisonment, the Rebbe was frequently ferried across the river to a building on the mainland to be interrogated by the Czar's secret police.

One night, as the small boat was making its way across the river, the sky cleared and a quarter moon illuminated the skies. Wishing to avail himself of the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of kiddush levanah ("sanctification of the new moon"), Rabbi Schneur Zalman requested from the official in charge that the boat be stopped for a few minutes. The official refused.

Suddenly, the boat came to a complete halt. Nothing the ferryman could do would advance it a single oar-sweep. Rabbi Schneur Zalman stood up in the boat and recited the first few

verses of Psalm 148, which preface the blessing on the moon.

But the Rebbe did not continue with the recitation of the blessing itself. As suddenly as it had halted, the boat resumed its movement toward the opposite shore. Again Rabbi Schneur Zalman turned to the official in charge and asked that the boat be halted.

"If you give me your blessing, in writing," said the official, "I'll stop the boat."

The Rebbe promised to fulfill his request. At a word from the official, the ferryman pulled in his oars and the Rebbe proceeded to perform the mitzvah of kiddush levanah.

The Decree

This story demonstrates the principle that the mitzvot (divine commandments) of the Torah are designed to be acted out within the natural world, not to overwhelm it and supersede it. In the words of the Midrash,

When G-d created the world, He decreed: "The heavens are G-d's, and the earth is given to man." But when He wished to give the Torah to Israel, He rescinded His original decree, and declared: "The lower realms may ascend to the higher realms, and the higher realms may descend to the lower realms."

G-d is infinite, beyond all definition and categorization. The physical reality is finite, and can relate only to definable and categorizable realities. So the very nature of creation dictates that an unbridgeable gulf separate the earthly from the divine. Man may reach for heaven, but the limitations of the physical state invariably shackle him to earth.

G-d may make an appearance on earth, dispelling its materiality and corporeality, but this means that the very characteristics that make the earth "earthly" have been suspended. No connection has been established between the lower realms and the higher realms, for at such times, the lower realms are no longer "lower realms."

This was the prevailing state of affairs before G-d gave us His Torah on Mount Sinai. Man was capable of great, noble, even holy deeds, but all human achievement was confined either to the "lower" or the "higher" realms—to the physical or to the supernal dimensions of existence. Man could develop and refine his physical self and world; he could even profoundly influence the supernal worlds and G-d's relationship with His creation; but he could not bridge the gap between the two realms. He was unable to sanctify the physical—to make G-d a present and palpable reality in his life. The earthly and the G-dly remained two distinct, self-contained worlds.

This "decree" was rescinded with the revelation at Sinai. At Sinai, G-d commanded us the mitzvot. Six hundred and thirteen human deeds, involving every area of human life, were deemed by G-d to constitute the fulfillment of His will. After Sinai, when physical man takes a physical coin, earned by his physical prowess and toil, and gives it to charity;

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or when he forms a piece of leather to a specified shape and dimensions, inserts into it parchment scrolls inscribed with specified words, and binds them to his head and arm as tefillin; or when he bakes flour and water as unleavened bread (matzah) and eats it on the first night of Passover—he is doing a mitzvah. A finite, physical deed becomes the realization of a divine desire.

Through the mitzvot, the lower realms ascend to the higher realms without being divested of their lowliness. On the contrary: the very features and characteristics that define the earthly as "lowly"—its physicality, finiteness and tactility—serve as vehicles of connection with G-d.

Hence Rabbi Schneur Zalman's reluctance to avail himself of any supra-natural aids to the fulfillment of a mitzvah. For to do so would counteract a most basic function of the mitzvah. The specialness of the mitzvah over other avenues of relationship with G-d lies in that even as it elevates a human deed to become the very embodiment of a divine desire, the mitzvah remains a wholly natural deed—a deed belonging to the human and physical realms of existence.

The Third Day

The principle of the "natural mitzvah" also sheds light on an episode in the life of the first Jew, Abraham.

In the closing verses of the 17th chapter of Genesis, we read how, by command of G-d, Abraham circumcised himself and all the members of his household. Chapter 18 opens by telling of a divine visit to the recuperating Abraham: "G-d revealed Himself to him in the Plains of Mamre, as he sat in the doorway of his tent in the heat of the day."

Our sages explain that G-d came to pay Abraham a "sick call"—indeed, G-d's visit to Abraham is cited as a source for the mitzvah of bikkur cholim, "visiting the sick." "It was the third day following his circumcision," says the Talmud, "and G-d came to inquire after his health."

But why did G-d wait three full days to visit the ailing Abraham? G-d's delay is even more puzzling in light of the fact that the natural healing process following circumcision takes three days.

The Talmud tells us that visiting the sick not only serves to uplift the spirits of the ill, but actually contributes to their recuperation. According to this, G-d delayed His visit to Abraham until such time as one of the primary functions of bikkur cholim was no longer operative!

Abraham's Mitzvah

Abraham lived several hundred years before the revelation at Sinai. In his day, the "decree" dis severing the earthly from the supernal was still in force. So though he was a man with great—indeed, unprecedented—achievements in both the earthly and supernal realms, his deeds could not bridge the schism between the two worlds.

Nevertheless, as the father of the Jewish people, Abraham's was a life that embodied the saga of a people, enfolding within it every milestone of Jewish history. The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai also had its precedent and prototype in the life of the first Jew.

The Sinai in Abraham's life was G-d's granting him the mitzvah of *milah* (circumcision). This was the only one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah expressly commanded to Abraham; this was the only occasion in which he was empowered to sanctify the physical, to surmount the divide between the human and the divine. Indeed, it was Abraham's fulfillment of the mitzvah of circumcision that paved the way for our empowerment at Sinai to bring together the higher and the lower realms through the observance of the mitzvot.

As the archetypal mitzvah, Abraham's circumcision had to be a completely natural act, in keeping with the aim that the mitzvot should be enacted within the natural world and thus effect a true union between the earthly and the divine. Not only the performance of the mitzvah itself, but also the preparations for it, as well as its aftermath, had to strictly conform to the natural mold. Had G-d visited Abraham before the third day, this would have alleviated the pain and discomfort that is naturally experienced during this period of time as the result of the act of circumcision.

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This would have constituted a supra-natural intervention in Abraham's mitzvah, diminishing its "naturalness" and the extent to which it bound the humanness of its observer with its divine commander.

A Swath of Life

As the example of Abraham's circumcision demonstrates, a mitzvah extends far beyond its momentary act of fulfilling the divine will. It reaches backward and forward in time to embrace all that leads up to and enables the act and all that results from it, and include them all in the encounter with G-d that the mitzvah effects.

So the cost of a mitzvah, whether it involves an outlay of money, time or effort, or even hardship or pain, should not be regarded as a "sacrifice" or "the price to pay" for an opportunity to serve the divine will. Rather, it should be welcomed as the way in which a greater area of our life is elevated to inclusion in an act of mitzvah—an act that marks the pinnacle of human achievement and our most profound medium of relationship with G-d. ❖

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Haftorah for Parshas Vayeira in a nutshell

Kings II 4:1-37

In this week's Torah reading, G-d promises a child to Abraham and Sarah, despite childless Sarah's advanced age. This week's haftorah describes a similar incident that occurred many years later — the prophet Elisha assuring an elderly childless woman that she will bear a child.

The haftorah discusses two miracles performed by the prophet Elisha. The first miracle involved a widow who was heavily in debt, and her creditors were threatening to take her two sons as slaves to satisfy the debt. When the prophet asked her what she had in her home, the widow responded that she had nothing but a vial of oil. Elisha told her to gather as many empty containers as possible — borrowing from neighbors and friends as well. She should then pour oil from her vial into the empty containers. She did as commanded, and miraculously the oil continued to flow until the last empty jug was filled. The woman sold the oil for a handsome profit, and had enough money to repay her debts and live comfortably.

The second miracle: Elisha would often pass by the city of Shunam, where he would dine and rest at the home of a certain hospitable couple. This couple even made a special addition to their home, a guest room designated for Elisha's use. When the prophet learned that the couple was childless, he blessed the woman that she should give birth to a child in exactly one year's time. And indeed, one year later a son was born to the aged couple.

A few years later the son complained of a headache and died shortly thereafter. The Shunamit woman laid the lifeless body on the bed in Elisha's designated room, and quickly summoned the prophet. Elisha hurried to the woman's home and miraculously brought the boy back to life. ❖

From Our Sages – Vayeira

He raised his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood by him (Genesis 18:2)

Who were the three men? The angels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Michael (“Who is like G-d?”) came to bring the tidings to Sarah of Isaac’s birth; Raphael (“Healing of G-d”), to heal Abraham; and Gabriel (“Might of G-d”), to overturn Sodom. But is it not written, “The two angels came to Sodom at evening”? Michael accompanied Gabriel, to rescue Lot.

(Talmud, Bava Metzia 86b)

For G-d has heard the voice of the lad where he is (Genesis 21:17)

The ministering angels hastened to indict him, exclaiming: “Sovereign of the Universe! Would You bring up a well for one who will one day kill Your children with thirst?” “What is he now?” asked G-d. “Righteous,” said the angels. Said G-d: “I judge man only as he is at the moment.”

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

It came to pass, after these things, that G-d tested Abraham (Genesis 22:1)

Said Rabbi Jonathan: A potter does not examine defective vessels, because he cannot give them a single blow without breaking them. What then does he examine? Only the sound vessels, for he will not break them even with many blows. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, tests not the wicked but the righteous.

(Midrash Rabbah)

Isaac and Ishmael were engaged in a controversy. . . . Said Ishmael to Isaac: “I am more beloved to G-d than you, since I was circumcised at the age of thirteen, but you were circumcised as a baby and could not refuse.” Isaac retorted: “All that you gave up to G-d was three drops of blood. But here I am now thirty-seven years old, yet if G-d desired of me that I be slaughtered, I would not refuse.” Said the Holy One, blessed be He: “This is the moment!”

(Midrash Rabbah)

He saddled his donkey (Genesis 22:3)

This is the very same donkey which Moses rode to Egypt (Exodus 4:20); and this is the very same donkey upon which the Messiah will arrive (Zechariah 9:9).

(Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 25)

He bound Isaac his son (Genesis 22:9)

Can one bind a man thirty-seven years old without his consent?

But when Abraham came to slaughter his son Isaac, Isaac said to him: “Father, I am a young man, and I am afraid that my body may tremble through fear of the knife and I will grieve you, and then the slaughter may be rendered unfit and this will not count as a real sacrifice; therefore bind me very firmly.”

(Midrash Rabbah)

Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-Yireh (Genesis 22:14)

Shem (the son of Noah) called it Salem, as it is written, “Malki-Tzedek, king of Salem” (Genesis 14:18). Said the Holy One, blessed be He: “If I call it Yireh as did Abraham, then the righteous Shem will resent it; while if I call it Salem as did Shem, then the righteous Abraham will resent it. Hence I will call it Jerusalem, including both names, Yireh Salem.”

(Midrash Rabbah) ❖

THE PATERSON MINYAN – CHIZZUK TIME: ONE FOR ALL AND ALL FOR ONE

The Paterson Shul, located at 510 East 27th Street (corner of 12th Avenue) will be holding a Minyan on

Saturday, November 11th
Parshat Chayeh Sarah
beginning at 9:00a.m.

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For more information, please email: JerrySchrantz@Gmail.com
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AM YISROEL CHAI

Avraham's Willingness to Bind Yitzchok vs Our Historical Martyrdom

The Torah reading concludes with the story of the binding of Isaac, showing Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son.

The commentaries ask, however, why Abraham's fulfillment of G-d's command is given this degree of importance. There are, after all, countless examples of martyrdom throughout our people's history.

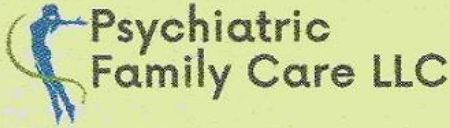
One of the explanations given is that Abraham's nature was characterized by love and kindness. These feelings dominated his character; as indicated by the great kindness which he showed wayfarers and travelers. Therefore for him to perform an act that required him to overcome these feelings of love was doubly difficult.

[Another] interpretation underscores Abraham's mission in the world at large. For years, he had preached to people of the need to worship G-d in one's heart and to scorn the pagan practices of human sacrifice. And now he was commanded to offer his own son. To do so would make him the laughingstock of all his neighbors and render meaningless all of his years of effort.


Our Sages teach "The deeds of the Patriarchs are a sign for their descendants." Abraham's full-hearted commitment endows us with a wealth of spiritual resources. We too can overcome our natural tendencies, rise above them in G-d's service and commit ourselves to Him with eagerness and desire. And we all have the power to put behind us all thoughts of our reputation, and even our own sense of what our mission is, and dedicate ourselves to fulfilling His command without hesitation or doubt. ❖

-- *The Rebbe*

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Good Shabbos to all!