

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 236

Vayera | A Person's Future Depends on Their Children's Education



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת וירא | אנגלית

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Parshat Vayera

Abandoning A Forbidden Marriage

Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky related the following story ('Vehigadeta,' Yom Kippur, p. 99):

"I was in Mexico collecting funds for Torah institutions when a weeping woman appeared before me.

She told me that she was married to a gentile—G-d forbid—but that she had informed her son that he was Jewish according to Halachah and brought him to the synagogue for the High Holidays.

Alas, now he was about to marry a gentile woman; she, on her part, did not know where to turn; she could not bear the thought of it.

I can hardly say that I couldn't understand her son; he was doing exactly what she herself had done—how would she have the moral authority to explain to him the severity of this prohibition?

For this reason, she turned to me: she could not explain the matter to her son properly, and thus, she asked me to do so.

Can I say that I thought there were great chances for success? I cannot.

Yet, who can stand in the face of a mother's tears? I asked her to phone her son and tell him that a rabbi from Israel wished to see him.

I traveled to the young Jewish man—the journey took about three-quarters of an hour.

He received me graciously and donated generously to the organization that I represent, but that was merely the pretext for my visit.

I began my argument by saying: "Have you heard of the saintly Chafetz Chaim?"

Yes, he had heard; he was a great rabbi indeed, he agreed.

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"Do you know that he was married to a gentile woman?"

The young man was stunned to hear my outrageous claim, and not only was he—his mother and my interpreter were as well. "It's absolutely impossible!" they all blurted out spontaneously.

I expressed feigned surprise at their reaction: "Why do you all think so?"

He responded: "Because he was such a great rabbi, he couldn't possibly have done that!"

I then admitted: "You are right—it is truly unthinkable; it is absolutely unfathomable.

But what is the essential difference between you and the holy Chafetz Chaim?

Just as he was a Jew, so too, you are also a Jew. The same law of G-d applies equally both to you and to the Chafetz Chaim.

From the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—you have surely heard of them—as well as from the Giving of the Torah, an unbroken Jewish chain has stretched on and

on, generation after generation, and will continue to until the coming of the Moshiach, speedily in our days.

If, however, you—G-d forbid—marry a gentile woman, you violently and abruptly sever that chain; you sin against a hundred generations that have preceded you."

He heard all that I said, yet it did not seem to move him.

I said to him: "I shall tell you a story, and you will decide for yourself.

The Rebbe of Kapitzhinitz, one of the great descendants of the Ruzhin dynasty in the United States, told me the following:

"I arrived in the United States as a refugee at the beginning of the war.

I had fled occupied Austria at the very last minute at the skin of my teeth.

Since I came as a refugee, I knew no English. I founded a study hall, and Jews who longed for the 'Alte Heim,' their homeland overseas and the fragrance of their forefathers'

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traditions, joined my congregation and prayed with me there.

One day, a crying woman came to see me.

She related that she was a widow and thus was struggling alone with all of the hardships of life; her sole consolation was her only son—she had no one else in the world.

However, he was now about to marry a gentile woman, and her world had collapsed upon her for a second time, yet all of her entreaties fell on deaf ears.

Her son believed that his fiancée was the most wonderful girl who would be a loving and devoted wife; they would yet grant her much happiness and abundant nachas, he promised her.

He was entirely convinced that his mother was merely captive to old prejudices and sought to thwart his happiness.

In her great distress, she came to the Kapitchinitzer Rebbe, hoping that he would speak with her son and change his mind.

The Kapitchinitzer Rebbe explained to her that he did not have a command of the English language, and the young man barely understood Yiddish; how would he converse with him?

He knew that Judaism vehemently opposed the step he was about to make, but Judaism did not feel obligatory to him; he did not put on tefillin, nor did he keep Shabbat.

She listened, and the fountain of her tears burst forth; they flowed like a torrent, and they melted the heart, and the Kapitchinitzer Rebbe acquiesced. "Very well them—bring him in, we shall try our best to speak to his heart."

The young man arrived, arrogant and defiant.

His mother had ordered that he come, so he came—but he didn't want to give off the impression that his mind would change; he was resolute in his decision to marry the gentile girl.

The Kapitchinitzer Rebbe said to him: "Calm yourself down, dear young man—I am not forbidding you, and I am not

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trying to convince you; allow me only to tell you a story that happened to me. Hear me out and decide for yourself."

The young man sat down. His suspicion had not entirely disappeared, but it was somewhat weakened.

The Rebbe related that, before the war, he had lived in Vienna, the capital of Austria.

Then, the Nazis took over the country in the notorious Anschluss—the union of the two German-speaking nations—and hostility and persecution of Jews began.

On Kristallnacht, the infamous night of pogroms throughout the country, hundreds of synagogues were burned; Gestapo thugs knocked on his door, arrested him in the dead of night, and threw him into the brutal dungeons of the secret police.

His eyes soon adjusted to the dark, and he discerned two groups crowded in the large cellar.

On one side groaned beaten and

wounded Jews—bleeding, with broken fingers and shattered limbs—those who had already endured interrogation, humiliation, and torture.

On the other side, huddled frightened, panic-stricken Jews—awaiting their turn, hearts pounding, gripped by deathly fear.

He joined the second group.

Beside him stood a clean-shaven, bare-headed Jew who was banging his head against the wall—it seemed as though he had lost his mind.

The Rebbe was shaken. He turned to him in a soft, fatherly voice: "What are you doing?"

No answer was offered—only dull thuds: bang, bang, bang.

The Kapitshtitzer Rebbe gently grasped his hand: "Stop; all will yet be well—we shall get through this."

The man looked at him with eyes burning with a strange intensity: "I do not deserve to get through this—I do not deserve to live."

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"Leave that for the Holy One, blessed be He, to decide; we are commanded to guard our lives," the Kapitchinitzer Rebbe responded firmly.

"No—I know it with certainty—I do not deserve to live!" the man sobbed.

"Why do you think so?" asked the Rebbe.

The man began his tale:

His parents had emigrated from Galicia to Austria out of dire poverty. They were G-d-fearing and upright, whereas he distanced himself from their path and cast off the yoke of Torah and mitzvot.

They suffered his misdeeds and bore it all silently.

But when he told them that he intended to marry a gentile woman, they informed him that that was the limit of their tolerance: by doing so he would cut himself off from Judaism and sadly also cut himself off from them.

He mocked them and said that they held old fears and

prejudices; they were trying to prevent his true happiness.

Needless to say, his words fell on deaf ears; they sat shivah for him—deeply mourning losing him.

—The young American man nodded to the Kapitchinitzer Rebbe; he was riveted—

The young Austrian Jew scorned his parents and pitied their narrow mindset; as far as he was concerned, they were merely confining themselves and forcing upon themselves misery; he would find his happiness with the gentile girl.

He went on to marry her, and they spent twenty years together.

"It has been twenty years since, Rebbe. My parents died of sorrow, and I scorned them.

Now, however, the Germans have taken over Austria and promulgated their infamous racial laws: a Jew is forbidden to marry a gentile woman, and a Jewish woman is forbidden to marry a gentile man.

No one knew that I was a Jew. Twenty years I have not set foot

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in a synagogue—not even on Yom Kippur.

Then, last night, my gentile wife went to the Nazi authorities and declared to them that I am a Jew.

Thereupon, they promptly threw me into the Gestapo dungeons and transferred our joint house and bank account into her sole possession.

Now tell me, Rebbe, do I deserve to live?!"

The Rebbe wept as he remembered this episode from the tragic years of the war; the mother wept as she listened.

Then suddenly, the young man leaped from his chair and bounded to the doorway, and, placing his hand upon the mezuzah, he swore that he would leave the gentile girl."

"The truth is," Rabbi Galinsky concluded, "that my own eyes filled with tears as well, and surprising, of the young man as well, together with his mother and my interpreter.

"What does the Rabbi want me to do now?" asked the young man.

I replied: "In your community, there is a Torah class twice a week; I want you to participate in it."

On the spot, they phoned the local rabbi, arranged for the young man's participation, and I blessed him warmly before parting from his family.

Thankfully and gratifyingly, the next time I came to town, he was already married to a fine Jewish woman.

The Terrifying Turn of the Snake's Heart

If we meditate upon this story, it is truly wondrous.

In but a single conversation, in but a few moments, the Rebbe of Kopitshinitz and, later, Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky as well,

succeeded in severing webs of impurity that had enmeshed two young men and raised them, all at once, to peaks of holiness.

Moreover, many times, it happens that a person is, in but a

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short time, in but a moment, spiritually stirred on his own, without anyone interacting with him at all, as illustrated by the following account of Rabbi Mordechai Doovid Neugershal ('Doresh Tov' – Elul, p. 174):

"He had wished to hear a lecture by a certain well-known rabbi, and when he saw a notice on the wall stating that this rabbi would speak in a particular synagogue nearby, he traveled there to join in and listen.

To his unpleasant surprise, he found himself in an entirely different synagogue on the far side of town, a synagogue whose name merely happened to resemble the intended synagogue; he was quite far from his intended destination, he noted in dismay.

In the synagogue to which he had mistakenly' come, he met a young Torah scholar, a friend of his, who related the following story:

A young Jew from Russia had returned to religious observance and, at one rare opportunity, recounted the first events and

seeds of inspiration that had led him back to his roots.

He had been a young man studying at university but was drafted into the Russian army and sent to fight in Afghanistan.

One day, his platoon established camp deep in the forest, and while he was walking outside the camp, he noticed a large snake crawling near the entrance to its lair.

Because he had studied zoology, he knew what would irritate the snake and what might make it respond in relative friendliness.

He acted in accordance with the known preferences of the snake and fed it, and indeed, the snake did him no harm.

The next day as well, he returned and found the snake and again gave it some food.

He did this day after day for three weeks, and the snake and the young man soon became good friends.

One day, the commander announced that the platoon had to move out within half an hour.

Parshat Vayera - The Terrifying Turn of the Snake's Heart

The young man hurried to the snake to bid it farewell, thinking that it would take him no longer than just a few minutes.

However, to his great horror, when the snake saw him, it reared up and stood erect, which he knew to mean that it was enraged and ready to strike.

He, with much self-discipline, decided that the correct reaction would be absolute stillness: he must remain frozen in place; if he were to begin to walk or run, the snake would easily overtake and bite him.

The snake, too, stood frozen, and the young man stood opposite it without moving, careful not to move or even stir a hand or foot and barely allowing himself to even breathe.

Ten seconds of this nightmare had gone by, then fifteen, and soon thirty; he was on the verge of collapse; the stress and the strain were completely unbearable.

The platoon was already departing—what would happen with him? At best, he would be thrown into a military jail; at worst, he might get lost in the

forest or fall captive to the Afghan Mujahideen guerrilla enemy.

An entire hour passed, and the snake still stood, unflinching.

"What is happening here?" the bewildered young man wondered. "It makes no sense: for three weeks this snake gladly accepted food from me and behaved like a friend, and now it threatens me so fiercely?!"

Nothing seemed to be logical, and when finally several hours had passed, the snake lowered itself and, coiling itself up, cast him one last glance and stealthily slipped back into its lair.

Filled with dread, the young man ran, with the last of his strength, to find his comrades, but alas, he found no one; their entire camp was completely deserted.

He set out in the direction they were supposed to have taken, and after a two-hour trek, he came upon the dead corpses of his friends. The Afghan rebels had laid an ambush and killed them all; no one had survived.

Parshat Vayera - Between the Living and the Sentient

Standing there, alone in Afghanistan, having miraculously survived a scathing attack, he said to himself: "If a snake can stand erect for hours in order to save me from the insurgents, I know that there is a G-d."

Thus began his spiritual process, which led to his complete

return to the observance of Judaism.

We must understand how, indeed, such a thing occurs—how does a person, in but an instant, abandon all of the vanities of the world and return to G-d in complete repentance?

Before we proceed to answer our question, we shall first preface.

Between the Living and the Sentient

During the six days of creation, the Holy One, blessed be He, created His world—a marvelous world full of light, grace, and beauty, populated by creatures of every shade, type, and color.

Our holy Sages, to whom all the secrets of creation were revealed, divided all of the creations of our world into four categories, in ascending order: inanimate, vegetative, living, and sentient.

The Vilna Gaon detailed the distinguishing points that these divisions emphasize ('Divrei Eliyahu,' p. 50):

The vegetative possesses two advantages over the inanimate:

1) it produces fruit;

2) it is suitable to be burnt for fuel.

The sentient being has two advantages over the living:

1) he possesses intellect;

2) he has a sense of humor.

The Vilna Gaon cites the verse, "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so too is the laughter of the fool" (Ecclesiastes 7:6), upon which the Midrash says (Bereshit Rabbah 16:3):

"When it is said to the fruit-bearing trees, "Why is your voice not heard?" the fruit trees

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reply, "We need not make our voice heard; our fruits testify on our behalf."

When it is said to the barren trees, "Why is your voice heard?" The barren trees reply, "Had only our voices been heard and we been seen."

Thus, mankind's advantage over the beast is their wisdom, but the fool, lacking wisdom, claims superiority by displaying his humor, for animals cannot laugh—therefore, the foolhardy laugh constantly to show that their character, too, surpasses that of the beast.

Trees that yield fruit are also fit for burning but do so silently, whereas thorns, which bear no fruit, crackle loudly when

kindled to proclaim and display that they too are trees."

In summary, just as thorns make noise when they burn to show that they are not mere inanimate matter, so too does the fool laugh loudly to show that he is a sentient being.

However, just as the fruit trees possess both advantages—fruit and fuel—so the wise man possesses both advantages—wisdom and humor.

In any case, we learn that animals do not laugh; it follows that humor is a fundamental and exalted trait unique to humanity, a trait whose uniqueness requires explanation.

But before that, let us further preface.

The Beginnings of Abraham

In the year 1948 to the creation of the world, Abraham, our forefather, was born, and ten years later, in the year 1958, Sarah our matriarch, was born.

In the year 1973, they were married, and they began their

shared labor of love, acquainting the entire world with the kingship and sovereignty of the Al-mighty.

Their divine service was performed with pure and pristine hearts, yet it took a very long time

Parshat Vayera - The Beginnings of Abraham

before any tangible results could be seen on the surface; only in the year 2000 to Creation—when Abraham was twenty-five years old—did the fruits of his labor begin to appear.

For twenty-three more years, Abraham and Sarah inspired hearts and minds, and myriads of people drew close to their burning and fiery flame of love of G-d.

Then, in the year 2023, to Creation, G-d revealed Himself to

Abraham and commanded him: "Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house" (Genesis 12:1).

Abraham, with innocence and submission, rose and took with him "Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their possessions that they had acquired, and all of the souls that they had made in Charan" (ibid., 12:5),¹ and set out on their way.

There, in the Land of Israel, his holy stature continued to grow

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

1. Rashi explains on this verse that "All of the souls that they had made in Charan" refers to the multitudes of people whom they brought under the wings of the Divine Presence.

Abraham converted the men, and Sarah converted the women, and the Torah credits them as though they had actually created them.

Rabbi Aharon Yehudah Leib Shteinman, of blessed memory, once commented that from here, we learn that a person is required to act; there is no requirement that they succeed:

Abraham and Sarah achieved great wonders and had much success in drawing myriads close to G-d, yet in the end, everyone returned to their former ways, and not even a single believer remained.

Yet nevertheless, the Torah notes that Abraham took with him "All of the souls that they had made in Charan," to teach that the impact Abraham had upon them stands to his merit forever.

Rabbi Shteinman shared that a director of an institution for individuals with learning disabilities once came weeping to the Brisker Rav: "We invest so much into our pupils, many nights we forfeit sleep with worry—but now, they have grown and gone on, and they have all thrown off the yoke of Heaven."

The Rav replied: "During all of the years they spent in your institution, they laid tefillin and prayed, they ate kosher and kept Shabbat; those good deeds remain for all eternity" (U'Matok HaOr—Pninei HaGrael, p. 95).

Parshat Vayera - The Beginnings of Abraham

and be enhanced; holy supernal lights and great and lofty faculties were abundantly granted him and revealed within him.

Abraham strove upward and onward with all of his might, as alluded to in the verse: "Abram journeyed on, continually traveling toward the Negev" (ibid., 12:9).

Our Sages taught (Yoma 28b) that Abraham fulfilled the entire Torah, including even the rabbinic ordinance of 'eruv tavshilin.' And in the furtherance of this very aim, Abraham sought someone with whom he could bond, as those same Sages

have instructed (Avot 1:6), "Acquire for yourself a friend."²

After a considerable amount of searching, he found three men who seemed to be suitable—Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre, who were all holy men, men of great stature, and their mutual friendship endured over a long period of time.

Then, when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, G-d appeared to him and commanded him concerning circumcision and informed him that Sarah, his wife, would soon bear a son.

Hearing this promise, Abraham immediately "fell upon his face and laughed, saying in his

Wellsprings of Wisdom

2. "The benefit of a friend is so great that a person must make every effort to find one and even spend money to "acquire" one, if necessary—by giving gifts to win his affection, for example. The Mishnah here does not refer to companionship for material enjoyment or mere social friendliness but to a bond between two people who share an aspiration for spiritual greatness and who help each other reach that goal.

Such a friend is what the Sages meant when they said (Ta'anit 23a), "Give me friendship or give me death."

Such a friend helps a person in various essential ways:

He aids him in Torah study; He helps him rectify the soul. At times, a person does not perceive his own flaws and does not know that he must correct them. It is good friends who assist one another in their spiritual ascent; finally, one can rely on a good friend for advice without hesitation, he may consult him in every matter, and receive sound, and good advice" (Mishnah Avot

1:6, Steinsaltz edition)

heart, 'Shall a child be born to one who is a hundred years old, and shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth?' (Genesis 17:17).

The theme of laughter continued: the Al-mighty

commanded regarding the soon-to-be-born child: "You shall call his name Isaac," which, as Rashi explains (*ibid.*, 17:19), was "on account of the laughter" of Sarah, his mother.

The Differing Advice of Abraham's Companions

After receiving the command of circumcision, Abraham decided that the time had come to ascertain whether his friends were truly G-d-fearing and inwardly pure.

He approached them and told them: G-d has revealed Himself to me and ordered me to circumcise the flesh of my foreskin.

Aner and Eshkol tried to dissuade him, insisting that it was unwise, unfitting, dangerous, and irresponsible; Mamre, however, encouraged him—if the Creator had commanded, what room was there for hesitation?³

It then became clear to Abraham that of the three friends, only one

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

3. Midrash Tanchuma states (Vayera, section 3):

"Abraham had three allies—Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre. When the Holy One, blessed be He, told him to circumcise himself, he went to seek their counsel.

He went to Aner and said: "G-d told me so and so." Aner replied: "You wish to make yourself blemished and weakened? ! The relatives of the kings whom you slew will come and kill you, and you will not be able to escape."

Abraham then went to Eshkol and said the same to him.

Eshkol replied: "You are old; if you circumcise yourself, much blood will then flow from your body, you will not endure it, and you will die."

Abraham left him and went to Mamre and said to him as well: "Such and such G-d told me; what do you advise?"

Mamre answered: "You seek counsel on this command from G-d? ! Was it not G-d who saved you from the fiery furnace and performed all those miracles, and rescued you from the kings? Were it not for His power and might, they would have slain you,

Parshat Vayera - The Differing Advice of Abraham's Companions

was spiritually whole and sound;⁴
his esteem for Mamre grew many

times over; what a righteous,
G-d-fearing man he was.

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and He preserved your two hundred and
forty-eight limbs—and now, concerning a
small part of one limb, you seek advice ? !

Do as He commands !”

4. Although outwardly there seemed to
be no discernible difference between
Eshkol and Aner on the one hand and
Mamre on the other, in the decisive
moment, the inner dimension was
revealed, and the gulf between them was
discovered to be immeasurable.

We must remain ever aware that outward
appearance is no proof of what lies within.

My father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, once
remarked (Imrei Noam, 'Chaye Sarah – Essay 1):

The Midrash (Tanchuma, Chayei Sara, section
4) relates that at Sarah's funeral, Abraham
recited the verses of the "Woman of
Valor," which is found at the end of
Proverbs, and the Midrash goes on to
detail how each verse was wondrously
fulfilled in our matriarch Sarah.

These verses were penned in the Book
of Proverbs by King Solomon, yet
Solomon did not compose them;
Abraham himself coined them in his
eulogy, and Solomon, receiving these
same words by divine inspiration,
recorded them for posterity.

Let us consider one verse: “She seeks
wool and flax” (Prov. 31:13).

The Midrash explains that Sarah insisted,
with adamant resolve, on separating
Isaac—who is called “wool”—from the
wicked Ishmael, who is referred to and
dubbed “flax.”

We might recall that the sons of Adam, Cain,
and Abel brought sacrifices to G-d. But
while Cain offered flaxseed, Abel offered
fatted sheep who gave wool. As we know,
G-d chose Abel and his wholesome offering.

In a similar vein, Isaac followed
Abel's righteous path and is called
"wool"—white and pure—whereas
Ishmael followed Cain's evil way (similar
even in the sense that he plotted to kill his
brother) and is therefore called "flax."

Sarah saw "the son of Hagar the
Egyptian, whom she had borne to
Abraham, jesting" (Genesis 21:9), which
the Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 53:11)
interprets to mean that Ishmael was
steeped in immorality, idolatry, and
bloodshed, even releasing arrows toward
Isaac under the guise of play.

Deeply afraid and fearful lest Isaac learn
from Ishmael's ways, Sarah turned at
once and said to Abraham: “Drive out
this maid and her son, for the son of this
maid shall not inherit with my son, with
Isaac” (Genesis 21:10).

This was a great act on the part of Sarah, for
which she was praised upon her passing.

Parshat Vayera - The Humility of Abraham our Forefather

Soon, ninety-nine-year-old Abraham circumcised himself, and with him, Ishmael, his son, was circumcised too.

Then, on the third day after their circumcision, when their pain was at its peak, our Torah portion—Parshat Vayera—begins its narrative.

The Humility of Abraham our Forefather

Our Torah portion opens with the following words: “G-d appeared to him in the plains

of Mamre, while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent” (Genesis 18:1).⁵

— *Wellsprings of Wisdom* —

Hence, a woman's praise is her self-sacrifice for the education of her children, ensuring they do not stray into foreign fields.

Fathers may be absent for a large part of the day; the sacred mission of guarding the children's conduct and knowing their companions rests chiefly upon the mothers.

We must know where our children are every hour. It is not enough for a child to say, “I am going to such and such a friend.”

One must know precisely where they are, with whom, and when they will return.

Just as a sentry must not slumber, so too, parents must stay alert every moment, aware of what their children are doing and where they are located.

A person's friends wield enormous influence, as Maimonides writes (De'ot 6:1):

“Man's nature is to be drawn in mind and deed after his companions and to behave like the people of his land.

Therefore, one must cleave to the righteous and dwell with sages in order to learn from their deeds and to distance himself from the wicked, as Solomon said: “He who walks with the wise will grow wise, but a companion of fools will come to harm” (Proverbs 13:20).

Fortunate indeed are the mothers who follow Sarah's path, devoting themselves to their children's proper education—greeting them lovingly after school, inquiring about their day, laboring to help with homework, and reviewing classroom studies.

Words cannot describe the reward awaiting such mothers in Heaven; through their toil, they will behold bountiful fruit, and their children will be blessed in fulfillment of the verse “all who see them shall acknowledge that they are the seed blessed by G-d” (Isaiah 61:9).

5. The 'Or HaChayim' (Genesis 18:1) notes that throughout the Five Books of Moses, G-d's name always precedes

Parshat Vayera - The Humility of Abraham our Forefather

It happened in the territory belonging to Mamre on the third day after the circumcision, when suddenly the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Abraham and spoke with him.

Rabbi Moshe of Pshevorsk explained the verse (cited by the 'Ohev Yisrael' of Apta) as follows:

"G-d appeared to him in the plains of Mamre"—meaning that Abraham was so utterly humble in his own eyes that he thought in his heart that he was unworthy of the Divine Presence; only Mamre, he believed, was the righteous one who truly served G-d, and therefore the Shechinah rested upon him, whereas Abraham himself had not yet attained that level.

This is the meaning of "G-d appeared to him": it seemed to him constantly that "G-d is in the plains of Mamre," i.e., that the Divine Presence rested only upon Mamre; Abraham regarded himself as still being on the outside, not yet having entered the realm of holiness—"he was sitting at the entrance of the tent," he felt that he still stood at the doorway to the tent of sanctity, and only merited the revelation of the Shechinah because he was in Mamre's domain.

Such, indeed, is the way of the holy and the righteous: even though they serve G-d with selfless dedication all of their lives, they genuinely feel in their heart and minds that they have not yet truly begun to serve Him, that they stand at the threshold, outside the tent of holiness.

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man's—"And G-d said to Abram" (Genesis 12:7); "And G-d spoke to Moses" (Exodus 6:10).

There, however, is one unique exception: "And he appeared to him, G-d, at the oaks of Mamre" (Genesis 18:1)—in this verse, Abraham's name

is uniquely written before the Divine Name.

The reason for this is that Abraham circumcised himself and thereby became, as it were, a crown upon the Creator, reaching—so to speak—a divine level even higher than G-d's name.

The Theme of Laughter

During the visit in which G-d “came to visit the sick,” Abraham lifted his eyes and saw three men trudging along the roadway.

He asked permission from G-d and immediately ran toward them.

Although it was the third day following his circumcision and he felt unwell, he hurried to the guests, brought them into his home, and began preparing food for them.

Nearby, thirteen-year-old Ishmael lay in pain—it was also his third day after circumcision—but precisely then, Abraham seized the chance to train him in acts of kindness: kindness is not done only when one feels like it or when it is pleasant; kindness is done at all times; because it must be done.

He turned and said to Ishmael: “Come with me—we must prepare a fine course of meat for our guests.”⁶

When the guests finished eating, they announced to Abraham: “At this appointed time I will return, and behold, a son will be to Sarah your wife” (Genesis 18:10).

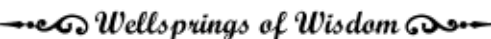
Upon hearing this, Sarah immediately “laughed to herself” (ibid., 18:12).

Later in the Torah portion, it states: “G-d remembered Sarah as He had said” (ibid., 21:1), and after a son was born to them in their old age, Abraham circumcised the newborn at eight days and called his name Isaac.

Subsequently, Sarah declared: “G-d has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me” (ibid., 21:6).

This theme repeats itself over and over and prompts us to ask: why is laughter mentioned in connection with Isaac so many times?

Let us, however, not get ahead of ourselves; we return to the



6. As Rashi comments on the verse: “Abraham ran to the herd, he took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the lad, and he

hurried to prepare it” (Genesis 18:7) “the lad” referred to here is Ishmael, who Abraham wished to train in fulfilling mitzvot.

Parshat Vayera - Guiding One's Offspring

three guests who were privileged to eat at Abraham's table.

After finishing their meal, they rose and left to overturn the five wicked cities of Sodom.

Meanwhile, as the Torah records, "G-d said, 'Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am doing?' For I have known

him; he will command his children and household after him to keep the way of G-d, doing righteousness and justice" (ibid., 18:17)—and He therefore told Abraham of His intention to destroy the cities of Sodom.

Here, we pause for a moment to reflect.

Guiding One's Offspring

In a discourse by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel of saintly memory ('Imrei Noam,' Vayera – Essay 3), he said the following:

G-d describes and says about Abraham: "For I have known him; he will command his children and household after him to keep the way of G-d, doing righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19).

Rashi explains:

“‘For I have known’—this is an expression of affection. ‘I have known him’ because ‘He will command’—because he commands his children concerning Me to keep My ways.”

Thus, the primary reason why G-d cherished our patriarch

Abraham so much and drew him close with great love is because Abraham labored mightily to educate his children and household in the way of G-d, continually exhorting them to keep His paths.

At a deeper level, 'command' ('yetzaveh') also implies connection. Abraham constantly strove to connect to his children, and this found practical expression on two planes:

Emotional bonding—Abraham lavished his family with love and affection, forging with them a deep inner attachment that opened their hearts to everything he asked of them in spiritual matters.

Active inclusion—He drew them into every mitzvah and holy

endeavor he undertook, ensuring that with each step of his spiritual progress, they were "in the vicinity" and never left far behind.

Our Parshah offers two striking such examples—one at its opening, one at its close.

In its opening episode, three angelic guests arrive, and Abraham, in his boundless generosity, decides to honor them with the finest meat delicacies. "He took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the lad, and he hurried to prepare it" (ibid., 18:7).

Rashi identifies the lad as Ishmael, whom he asked to assist him in order—"to train him in mitzvot." Abraham involved his son in the mitzvah of hospitality rather than performing it alone.

In the closing episode, we similarly find such an example: G-d

commands Abraham: "Take, please, your son, your only one, whom you love—Isaac." (ibid., 22:2).

Although only Isaac was to be offered, Abraham took Ishmael along and even woke him early: "He rose early and took his two lads with him ? and Isaac his son"—first the lads, then Isaac—because he wants Ishmael included in every sacred undertaking of his. ⁷

Such connection and inclusion won Abraham G-d's unparalleled affection.

A parent who desires similar divine favor must, likewise, educate his children with zeal and fervor in matters of holiness, constantly commanding them to keep to G-d's way, exactly as Abraham did.

True love for one's children demands bestowing them the

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

7. Abraham also wished to avoid favoritism between Isaac and Ishmael, in keeping with the Talmudic warning (Shabbat 10b) never to discriminate among one's sons, lest jealousy ensue—as occurred with Joseph's coat of many colors, which ultimately led the family to descend to Egypt.

By rousing Ishmael first, Abraham sparked in him the feeling that his father loved him dearly, thereby deepening Ishmael's love for his father.

A wise parent must shower abundant love upon every child without distinction so that no one feels less cherished than another.

best education possible, with no concessions.

When registration time arrives, one must overcome every obstacle and enroll them in institutions that teach the Torah in the traditional and authentic way.

Parents must be devoted to providing their offspring with an education that embraces all of the Torah's principles in their entirety.

In return, they will merit children who are whole in their fear of G-d and in holiness, children who will be a true source of Jewish pride.

Overcoming obstacles starts at birth, not just at school age. "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning" (Ecclesiastes 7:8): a child's successful "end" begins and is a result of sanctification at the very start of life.

Consider Elisha ben Avuyah. For most of his life, he was a revered Sage—Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes was his pupil—yet he later lapsed into heresy.

The Jerusalem Talmud (Chagigah 2:1) traces his downfall to parental conduct in his infancy:

His father Avuyah, a Jerusalem notable, hosted a lavish brit milah. While guests reveled, Rabbis Eliezer and Yehoshua sat apart, engrossed in Torah; heavenly fire encircled them. Awestruck and fearful, Avuyah cried out: "Masters, will you burn my house?" They replied: "This is the Torah's holy fire; as was at Sinai, so too whenever Torah is studied fittingly."

Overwhelmed, Avuyah declared, "If so, I dedicate my son to Torah." His motive, however, was not entirely pure—to procure similar wonders for his child—and resultingly, his son's dedication to Torah and G-d's commands did not endure.

Furthermore, his mother, while pregnant, enjoyed the aroma at idolatrous shrines; the impure scent permeated the fetus, later erupting as spiritual venom in his later age.

Parshat Vayera - Defining 'Laughter'

Hence, our custom at a brit milah, we say, "Just as he has entered the covenant, so may you bring him into Torah," whereupon the father donates a significant sum to charity as "registration fees" for the infant's future study in Talmud-Torah and yeshivah.⁸ Dedicating the child at this earliest rite forges a bond of blood—lifelong devotion, despite all possible sacrifices.

We must learn from the above that in order to implant and inculcate proper values in our offspring; we must shower them with genuine love and affection.

Even when a child's behavior is wanting, we must connect with them emotionally so that the

heart and mind will remain open to proper and holy matters.

Include children in every mitzvah and holy act you do! The holiness of our posterity depends on these pure souls.

A father must not go to prayer or study and "forget" his children.

He must bring them to synagogue, seat them beside him, open the siddur, and gently guide them to pray and listen properly.

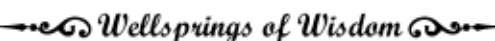
Thus, holiness will take root in their heart, as the verse says: "Train a child according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

And now, let us return to the previous questions we posed.¹

Defining 'Laughter'

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus wrote the following ('Tiferet Shimshon,' Bereshit, p. 208):

The principal reason why our patriarch Isaac received his name is the laughter



8. The Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote ('Hayom Yom,' 28 Adar II):

"At a brit milah, we say, "Just as he has entered the covenant, so may he enter Torah, marriage, and good deeds."

Our custom is to make a down payment at this occasion for the child's tuition; once, upon sharing these words, the Rebbe Rayatz handed over a set sum, saying, "This is for the yeshivah."

Parshat Vayera - Defining 'Laughter'

of his parents, Abraham and Sarah.

To understand what was so essential about this laughter that Isaac was named after, we must first introduce a premise:

Man—by nature—catalogs his surroundings, and they appear according to the definitions he places upon them; when he classifies something as frightening, he will automatically relate to it as such, and the reverse is likewise true.

With worldly matters, this is relatively straightforward, yet when one tries to assign a definition or attribute to the Creator, he will encounter difficulty, even if a man imagines the Creator to have the great characteristics of a mighty and influential billionaire tycoon or the most brilliant physician, he still has not even begun to truly recognize Him. Yet, on the other hand, although "no thought can grasp Him at all," nevertheless, in general, and in proportion to man's capacity, some definition of the Creator's greatness is required to be

appreciated for one to be able to relate to Him and be in awe and love Him.

It appears that a fitting definition of the Creator's greatness is His power of renewal and novelty; His ability to constantly and infinitely create genuine innovations testifies to absolute infinity.

Suppose we examine an impossibility—say, placing the breadth of the entire world inside a small box—and we declare it to be not able to be done; we explain that "it contradicts reality," "reality" referring to the totality of the laws of nature, chief among them the timeless rule that a large object cannot be inserted into a tiny space.

However, if there exists an endless and infinite power to renew and innovate—to bring forth something entirely new from absolute nothingness—nothing then stands out of the realm of the possible; whatever may seem impossible now may have its reality innovated and changed for it to in fact be a possible reality.

Parshat Vayera - Defining 'Laughter'

Thus, the attribute and power of novelty is the revelation of the perfect infinitude of G-d, Who is therefore called "omnipotent," for He does not remain confined to existing nature.

Since G-d created man in order that he recognizes Him, which, as stated, is discerned specifically through 'the power of novelty'—as we say daily, "Who in His goodness renews the work of Creation continually"—He, therefore, granted man the capacity to perceive and appreciate 'novelty.'

Here's a rephrased version:

Let us elaborate: The capacity to discern and value novelty is a noble trait unique to humans, not found in animals. A beast may not truly grasp newness—for instance, offer a horse accustomed to barley a plate of fine sweets, and while it might savor the flavor, it cannot truly appreciate the innovation behind it.

This also is the reason why the capacity for humor belongs only

to man; he laughs, whereas an animal does not.

The reason for this is that laughter arises from the element of novelty and the unexpected: imagine a person walking proudly in a dazzling white shirt who suddenly slips dramatically and falls into a puddle of mud, befouling himself entirely—such a scene naturally provokes laughter. It is an event that reverses the proper, usual order of things; a fine shirt that suddenly becomes utterly filthy is something outside of the norm and the ordinary, and the more unusual and novel the event, the more laughter it elicits.

This explains, in much the same manner, why our patriarch was named Isaac, 'laughter'; Isaac represented and symbolized sheer spiritual novelty, the divine trait of renewal.

His very birth and existence were an unnatural novelty: Abraham and Sarah were barren—not merely physically, such that some medical solution might make having children possible, but moreover, Abraham

Parshat Vayera - Defining 'Laughter'

beheld in the constellations and saw that in the root of the cosmic order, he would not be able to beget ? offspring; thus the tidings that spoke of him having children by Sarah came as a tremendous surprise, novelty, and a source of laughter for Abraham and Sarah.

Likewise, when Isaac was born, Sarah said, "G-d has made laughter for me; whoever hears will laugh for me" (Genesis 21:6)—because the birth was an astonishing reality that emanated solely from G-d.

Later, G-d told Abraham to raise him up as a burnt offering, and Abraham indeed raised him with that intention; the knife even began touching his throat, his soul soared, ready to fly forth, and he was willing and able to become a pile of ashes, as our Sages say: "Isaac's ashes are piled upon the altar" (Zevachim 62b)—yet despite all this, ultimately, he remained alive in this world, a spiritual creature in a physical world, a novel reality that provokes laughter.

Isaac remained an unblemished offering in soul throughout all of

his days, to the point that G-d conferred His name upon him during his lifetime—something He did not do for Abraham or Jacob—for he was already cleaving to the World to Come, wholly bound in holiness while in a physical body.

That is true 'laughable': what business does such a righteous man have in this lowly world ?

Isaac's name means laughter in the future tense, alluding to the World to Come, which he fashioned and merited for the sake of all of the Jewish people; he is our patriarch who brought us the cleaving and closeness to G-d—the essence of the World to Come, wherein the Jewish people "will delight in G-d and bask in the radiance of His Presence"—the greatest novelty of all—and when "our mouth shall be filled with laughter" (Psalms 126:2), for we shall behold never-ending novelties, each one unprecedented, followed by another and another—a perfect world without end.

We shall conclude with the holy words of the 'Ohev Yisrael.'

Parshat Vayera - Every Jew—Contained within Abraham's Soul

Every Jew—Contained within Abraham's Soul

In the great Chassidic work, 'Ohev Yisrael' (Parshat Vayera), the following is explained:

After G-d sent the angels to overturn Sodom, He said: “‘Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am doing?’ For I have known him; he will command his children and household after him to keep the way of G-d, doing righteousness and justice” (Genesis., 18:17)—and as a result of this closeness, G-d shared with Abraham His intention to destroy the cities of Sodom.

Here, we must pause for a moment to reflect:

This verse speaks in praise of Abraham. Although Abraham served G-d with pure, refined intellect and with great self-sacrifice, fulfilling all of the divine commandments with joy and great love. Nonetheless, his divine service appeared to him to be negligible—compared to the goodness and blessing, life and kindness, which G-d showered upon him at every moment;

whatever he did could never "payback" G-d, even to the smallest degree.

Instead, Abraham sought how to bring the Al-mighty delight, and he ultimately resolved to perform all of his good deeds on behalf of all of the people of Israel.

All the offspring and the souls of Israel were contained in Abraham's mind and thought—just as a child is sourced from the father's brain—so too, Abraham's mind was the root of all Jewish souls until the end of days.

Thus, whenever he performed a mitzvah, he did so for all of Israel, with all of his powers and with all of the descendants who were destined to extend from him, and it is considered as though they had performed the mitzvah with him.

This conferred an immense and eternal benefit upon his offspring, who are therefore more able and ready, in an instant, to

accept upon themselves the yoke
of Heaven.

This reinforces the idea that
we mentioned earlier: when
we study Torah and fulfill

G-d's commandments, we must
include and involve all of our
descendants and offspring in the
good and proper acts that we
fulfill.

Shabbat Shalom!



Parshat Vayera - Summary and Practical Conclusions

Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. Every Jewish man and woman must know that the one thing that is dearest to G-d is the education of our children.

Education must manifest itself as a connection between the child and the parent—first, an emotional bond and a meeting of the minds, and secondly, as a spiritual bond:

A parent must never leave their children behind; with every step of his own spiritual ascent, he must ensure and guarantee the advance of his family alongside him.

2. In educating children, there can be no compromises; whoever truly loves their children must demand for them the very best without concessions or leniencies.

When the season of registration arrives, one must overcome every hindrance and make every effort to enroll their children in institutions that convey the study of the Torah in its entirety, without “leniencies” or compromises.

3. The important role and most praiseworthy merit of a woman is her devotion to educating her children in the path of the Torah, ensuring that they do not, G-d forbid, graze in foreign fields or learn evil ways.

For most of the day, fathers are absent from the home while mothers are with the children; thus, the holy mission they have been tasked with is to keep watch over the children's actions and notice with whom they associate.

4. Parents must know and monitor their children's movements, knowing at all times where they are and with whom they spend time; it is not enough that a child says, “I am going to such-and-such a friend,” rather the parents must know precisely where he is going, where he will be, and when he will return.

Just as a guard on duty may not fall asleep, so too must every parent remain highly vigilant and alert to all that occurs to their children at every moment, knowing what they are doing and where they are, lest they stumble into undesirable places.

Always remember that friends exert great influence upon a child's soul.

5. We must constantly remember:

When studying the Torah and advancing in the performance of the mitzvot, one must be sure to include all of his family members and surroundings in their ascents and spiritual rise.



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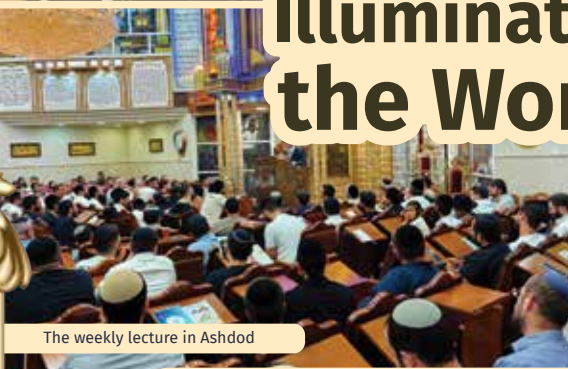


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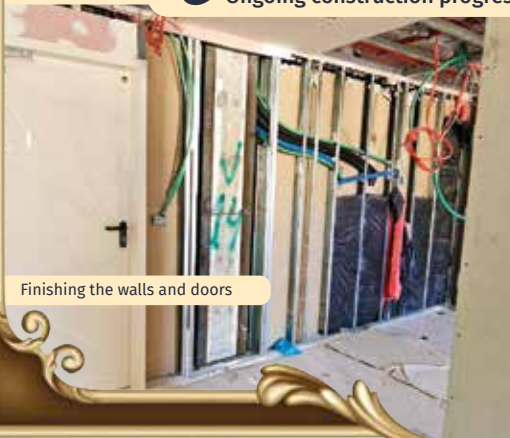


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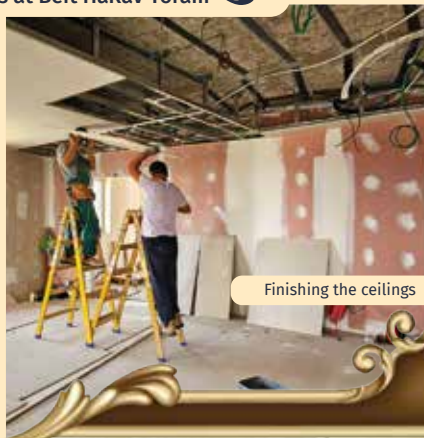


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17th of Cheshvan ,5786



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New York	4:27 pm	5:26 pm	5:56 pm
Miami	5:17 pm	6:10 pm	6:47 pm
Los Angeles	4:37 pm	5:33 pm	6:06 pm
Montreal	4:15 pm	5:18 pm	5:43 pm
Toronto	4:42 pm	5:44 pm	6:11 pm
London	4:05 pm	5:14 pm	5:33 pm
Jerusalem	4:29 pm	5:19 pm	5:54 pm
Tel Aviv	4:26 pm	5:16 pm	5:50 pm
Haifa	4:24 pm	5:17 pm	5:50 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:27 pm	5:20 pm	5:54 pm

Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of

HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

The holy Shelah writes:

When you put on tefillin; even though you later remove them, throughout the day there rests upon you a divine light that you do not notice, but someone who has pure eyes sees upon you the imprint of the tefillin.

When a person dons tefillin the four passages in them, correspond to the G-d's holy name: "Sanctify to Me every firstborn" is the Yud, "And it shall be when G-d brings you" is the first Hei, "Hear, O Israel" is the Vav, "And it shall come to pass, if you will heed" is the final Hei.

Thus, when you put on tefillin, the Name of G-d is literally called upon you.



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