



SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA · 15 CHESHVAN 5772 · NOV. 12, 2011 · VOL. 19 NO. 4

PARSHA INSIGHTS

## MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME!

“...And behold, three men were standing over him...” (18:2)

There are some people who look like they’re giving but they’re really taking. And there are some people who look like they’re taking when they’re really giving.

Anyone who buys a \$5,000-a-plate charity dinner is giving a lot of charity, but he’s also getting a lot of status mixed in with his sushi.

On the other hand there are people who look like they’re takers but they’re really giving.

Once there was a Jewish traveling salesman who found himself in a largely non-Jewish town on Friday afternoon. His business had delayed him way beyond his expectations and there was now no way he could get home for Shabbat. He had heard that there was just one Orthodox family in town where he could spend Shabbat, and as the sun was starting to set he made his way there.

The owner of the house opened the door to him and showed him into the front parlor. “Can I stay here for Shabbat?” asked the traveling salesman. “If you like,” replied the host. “The price is \$200.” “\$200!” exclaimed the traveling salesman. “That’s more than a first-class hotel!” “Suit yourself,” replied the host.

Realizing that he had no option, the salesman reluctantly agreed. In the short time left before Shabbat the host showed the salesman his room and the kitchen and the other facilities for his Shabbat stay.

As soon as the host had left the room the salesman sat down and thought to himself. “Well, if this is going to cost me \$200 I’m going to get my money’s worth.” And for the whole of the Shabbat he availed himself unstintingly of the house’s considerable facilities. He helped himself to the delicious food in the fridge. He had a long luxurious shower before and after Shabbat. He really made himself “at home.”

When he had showered and packed he made his way downstairs and plunked two crisp \$100 bills down on the table in front of his host.

“What’s this?” enquired the host. “That’s the money I owe you,” replied the salesman. “You don’t owe me anything. Do you really think I would take money from a fellow Jew for the mitzvah of hospitality.” “But you told me that Shabbat here costs \$200.”

“I only told you that to be sure that you would make yourself at home.”

When a guest comes to your home, his natural feeling is one of embarrassment. No one likes being a taker. When a guest brings a present the worst thing you can say is “You shouldn’t have done that!” Rather, take the bottle of wine (or whatever it is), open it up and put in the middle of the table and say “Thank you so much.” By allowing him to contribute to the meal, you will mitigate his feeling of being a taker and you will have done the mitzvah of hospitality to a higher degree.

The mitzvah of hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. We learn this from the beginning of this week’s Torah portion. G-d had come to visit Avraham on the third day after his *brit mila* — the most painful day. God made the day extremely hot so that Avraham should not be bothered by guests. When God saw that Avraham was experiencing more pain from his inability to do the mitzvah of hospitality than the pain of the *brit mila*, He sent three angels who appeared as men so that Avraham could do the mitzvah of hospitality. When these ‘men’ appeared Avraham got up from in front of the Divine Presence to greet his guests.

Hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham “bargains” G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot’s daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son,

Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar’s son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham’s unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

## ISRAEL Forever

### THE CHOSEN MOUNTAIN

“And Avraham called the name of that site ‘Hashem Yireh’ as it is said on this day, on the mountain G-d will be seen.” (*Bereishet 22:14*)

“Hashem Yireh”, Targum Onkeles explains, means that this site, Mount Moriah, will be chosen by G-d as the place where His spirit will dwell and where sacrifices will be offered.

A bitter element of our people’s exile is that not only do we lack the *Beit Hamikdash* which stood on this site but that it has become a house of worship for those who wish

to destroy us.

Although the Halacha forbids us in our present ritually impure state to physically ascend the Temple Mount, every Jew, wherever he is, and wherever he prays to Heaven, directs his prayers to this “Gate to Heaven” and longs for the day when this site will be restored to its rightful owner. It is this emotional bond with this holy site which gives us the confidence that it will eventually belong only to Israel forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### ERETZ CHEMDA – A PLEASANT LAND

This name, familiar to us from the second blessing in our Grace after Meals, is found in Tanach both in references to the past and to the future.

In *Tehillim (106:24)* King David recalls the sin of the nation in accepting the slander of Eretz Yisrael perpetrated by the spies and thus being guilty of “despising the pleasant land” and being compelled to wander for forty years in the wilderness before inheriting it.

The Prophet Yirmiyahu (*3:18-19*), on the other hand,



envisions the end of exile when “the House of Yehuda shall walk with the House of Yisrael and they shall come together out of the land of the north to that land that I have given for an inheritance to your fathers, a pleasant land, the finest heritage of all the nations.”

Jews throughout history have atoned for the mistake of “despising the pleasant land” by appreciating its pleasantness in the worst of times and praying for its ultimate return to maximal pleasantness as promised by the Prophet.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

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*This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.*

- When the obligation to redeem the firstborn of a donkey does not apply
- Selling animals to a non-Jew or maintaining a partnership with him
- What is considered a blemish which disqualifies a firstborn animal from serving as a sacrifice
- The exemption of *kohanim* and Levites
- Was there redemption of firstborn in the Wilderness?
- The challenges of Kuntrukus to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai
- Why only firstborn donkeys must be redeemed
- The status of an animal which does not resemble the species of its mother
- Interpreting the word “ess”
- Whether offspring of a *treifah* can serve as a sacrifice
- When one fish swallows another

## THE SWALLOWED FISH

If a non-kosher fish is swallowed by a kosher one it is forbidden for consumption. This ruling of the *mishna* is challenged by Tosefot on the basis of a *mishna* in Mesechta Ohalot. There it is stated that if a fish has consumed flesh of a human corpse and has held it in its body for a short period that flesh can no longer be a source of *tumah* (ritual impurity). This indicates that the brief digestion of a swallowed object transforms its status. Why then does this same transformation not remove the status of non-kosher from the swallowed fish?

The answer submitted by Tosefot is that there is a difference between forbidden food and *tumah* so that the non-kosher status of the swallowed fish is not affected by brief digestion as in the case of *tumah*.

Based on this distinction Tosefot rejects the effort of some commentaries to conclude from the *mishna* in *Ohalot* that if a kernel of wheat is found on Pesach in the stomach of a chicken it is not considered forbidden *chametz* because it has been digested. Once we accept the distinction made by Tosefot between forbidden food and *tumah*, this conclusion is not applicable.

• *Bechorot 7b*

## WHAT THE Sages SAY

“The word ‘ess’ in the command to fear G-d teaches us to also show respect for Torah Sages.”

• *Rabbi Akiva - Bechorot 6b*

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## G-D-LIKE

**From: Emily**

*Dear Rabbi,  
I am having trouble with the concept that G-d created Mankind in His image and likeness. Does G-d have an image such that man's could be compared to it? Can we truly understand G-d in any way such that man could be considered like Him? What's more, the Hebrew used in the verse for image is "tzelem" which implies form, and that for likeness is "demut" which implies appearance. Please help me out of my confusion.*

Dear Emily,

By asking these questions you are in good company. Many of the great classical commentators have asked or addressed them as well.

Rashi seems to understand "tzelem" more like you do, namely that it implies more shape or form than image. He therefore translates "tzelem" as mould. However, he addresses your question by explaining that G-d created mankind not literally in His form, but rather in His mould – meaning in the mould He formed for the purpose of fashioning mankind. Regarding likeness, you differ from Rashi in that he explains likeness to mean similar not in appearance but rather in quality — the point of comparison being in intellect and understanding.

Thus Rashi explains the verse to mean that G-d fashioned mankind's physical form in His "mould" created specially for that purpose, and imparted within people wisdom which made them similar to G-d who has Wisdom.

Rambam, in his "Guide to the Perplexed", also addresses your "confusion". He explains that, as you note, and based on verses, G-d cannot be described or quantified in any way, and saying that man was created in G-d's image, likeness or form is unthinkable. Rather, just as King David in Psalms compared himself to a drifting lone bird of the desert in order to emphasize a specific detail and context of comparison, namely his being alone, deserted and adrift, but not that

he could be compared to a bird in any other way, so too the Torah intends to compare man to G-d in specific, limited ways.

Man alone is endowed – like his Creator – with morality, reason and free-will. He can know and love G-d and shares spiritual affinity with Him through his actions and reason. It is in this sense, then, that the Torah describes mankind as having been created in His image and likeness.

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, in *Nefesh HaChaim*, refines this approach even further. He argues that the point of comparison is specifically related to the word used there for G-d, namely "Elokim". As opposed to the four-letter name for G-d (yud, hey, vav, hey) which denotes G-d's power of Creation, "Elokim" denotes G-d's power of rule over that Creation. Therefore, when the Torah writes that mankind was created in the likeness of "Elokim", it means that man alone was endowed with the power to rule over G-d's creation. This is supported by the fact that the very same verse (Gen. 1:26) states, "They shall rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and over the animals, the whole earth, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth".

If in this way the *Nefesh HaChaim* explains the specific way in which man was created in G-d's likeness, it seems from the continuation of the book that the specific way in which he was created in G-d's form refers not to his physical form, but rather to the form of his soul. The human soul, being part of G-d in this world, actually parallels, and in fact serves as a venue through which G-d's influence pervades, regulates and rules the world. Mankind is thus G-d-like, according to Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, in his ability to be a mini-"Elokim": First in his physical dominion over the world through the venue of his body, but even more importantly in his spiritual dominion over all worlds through the venue of his Divine soul.

Sources:

- *Rashi's commentary is based on teachings in the Talmud (Chagiga 16a, B.B. 58a, Ketubot 8a, Sanhedrin 38a) and Midrash (B.R. 8:11).*
- *The ArtScroll Chumash*
- *Sefer Nefesh HaChaim, Part I, Ch. I*

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# QUESTION MARKET

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## JUDASIM'S GOLDEN RULE

**Question:** When I finish my workday I try to spend as much time as possible studying Torah with a partner in the Beit Midrash of my local synagogue. My partner often takes a Talmudic volume from one of the shelves in order to look up some reference and then leaves it on our table to be returned to its shelf when we conclude our learning session. Is this the right thing to do in order to avoid an interruption of our studies or must he return it as soon as he has finished using it?

**Answer:** While it is certainly important to avoid any unnecessary interruptions in the sacred activity of Torah study, it is also important to avoid being the indirect cause of others having to interrupt their study. It may be assumed that you and your partner are not the only people studying in that Beit Midrash and there is a likelihood that at least one of them will also be interested in referring to the particular volume which your partner took from the shelf, the only one of its kind on the shelves. The failure of your partner to immediately return it to its place after using it may thus cause this other fellow to

lose precious time touring the Beit Midrash to find what he is looking for.

This caution for consideration of others has extensions into other matters, both within a Beit Midrash or any public place. Many such places offer the people who study or work in them facilities for hot beverages but do not supply disposable cups. Should someone avail himself of one of the limited supply of glass cups and fail to return it to its place washed and ready for use, he is guilty of causing an inconvenience for the next person interested in a drink.

One can apply this to so many areas of life, from returning a book to a library or an item borrowed from any one of the "Gemach" free loan services which are a common feature in religious communities. No one wants to be told when looking for an item he needs that it is unavailable because some previous borrower was lax in returning it. So remember how the Sage Hillel encapsulated the entire Torah for the conversion candidate with Judaism's "golden rule": "Don't do to others what you don't want done to you."

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### COUNTING TEETH

One of the most encouraging signs of spiritual revival in our generation is the growing number of Jews regularly studying the laws of *lashon hara* and guarding their tongue against speaking gossip and slander. The laws they study were compiled by the saintly sage Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen. He is known as the "Chafetz Chaim" because that is the title of his seminal work on this important subject.

The story is told of a Torah scholar who paid a visit to this sage in his home in the Polish town of Radin. Despite his frail condition in the middle eighties of his life, the Chafetz Chaim was in a particularly good mood as he asked the visitor to come close to him and open his, the sage's, mouth. There

was an understandable hesitation to comply with this request but the sage insisted. Surprise followed surprise as the sage insisted that his teeth be counted! Unable to refuse a repeated order to do so, the guest indeed counted the sage's teeth and was amazed to find that he had all the teeth a person could ever have and that they were in prime condition despite his advanced age.

Then came the following explanation of this phenomenon from a saintly Jew who had alerted generations to the responsibility of exercising extreme caution in regard to what they spoke:

"I guarded what came out of my mouth and G-d guarded my mouth in return."

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