

Parshat Vayeira: Realistic Ramifications

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein
Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Parshat Vayeira begins with an incredible scene of Avraham Avinu, three days post circumcision, leaving Hashem's presence to invite three strangers to his tent. The Torah records the details of Avraham's service to these men/angels. He says, " 'Let some water be brought and wash your feet and recline beneath the tree. I will fetch a morsel of bread...' Then Avraham ran to the cattle, took a calf... and gave it to the youth... to prepare it..." Rashi explains that Avraham wanted water to be brought to wash away any dust of idol worship, since he assumed they were Arabs. Rashi tells us that Hashem repaid Avraham's descendants according to Avraham's personal involvement. Because he delegated bringing the water to Yishmael rather than bringing it himself, water would be provided to the Jews in the desert by Hashem's delegate Moshe, rather than directly by Hashem. Rashi cites the verse in Bamidbar, "And Moshe lifted his hand and hit the rock..." Rabbi Svei notes that conversely, when Avraham was directly involved, Hashem was also directly involved in the parallel *chesed* in the desert. Avraham ran to prepare food for the strangers, so Hashem Himself sent the manna to feed *Bnei Yisroel* in the desert. Similarly, as Avraham personally stood over the visitors and served them as they reclined under the shade of the tree, Hashem stood over us and personally protected us with the shade of the Clouds of Glory.

The Torah records each step of Avraham's *chesed* as well as the final results, because each was infused with spiritual thoughts. It is precisely because of these spiritual thoughts that the food itself rose above the physical, and the angels were able to consume it. Every act of *chesed* we do, no matter how small, should have the element of spirituality in it, of seeing the divine image in the

recipient. Every time we do *chesed*, we must realize that we are not only following our patriarch's model, but actually emulating Hashem. Just as every Torah scribe who writes a *Sefer Torah* must imbue every action relating to that *Torah* with spirituality, from preparing the quills and the parchment to writing each letter, writes the Ruach Eliyahu, so must we imbue every act of ours with spiritual purpose. There is special significance to the timing too. Avraham had just undergone circumcision and became the first Jew, writes Rabbi Druck z"l quoting the Chidushei Harim. This act of *chesed* is the first *mitzvah* he is doing as a Jew. Therefore, this activity had special import for the future of his descendants. Everything Avraham Avinu did would support the world through the *chesed* he modeled for his descendants. Further, writes the Be'er Yosef, the *hachnosat orchim* Avraham Avinu did post- surgery showed tremendous devotion and self - sacrifice. As Avraham went above and beyond the norm here, so did Hashem go above and beyond for *Bnei Yisroel* in the desert.

But just as each positive act has ramifications for the future, so does each omission, notes the Chochmat Hamatzpun. As Rabbi Goldstein adds, every act we do, every detail in its performance, must be done with joy, for we do not know its ripple effect. We tend to sell ourselves short and don't even strive to become greater, observes Rabbi Svei z"l. We need to do our part, to plant the seed, and Hashem will make it grow.

We still must ask why Avraham chose to delegate the task of bringing the water to his son Yishmael. Certainly, it was not a matter of laziness, for, as Rabbi Moshe Feinstein tz"l points out, Avraham did most of the harder work himself. He wanted to use this opportunity as a teachable moment so that Yishmael

would learn to do *chesed* and understand that *mitzvah* performance is available to everyone, not just to those of high spiritual stature like his father. But Rabbi Feinstein z"l notes, performing the *mitzvah* himself with joy would have provided a valuable role model to Yishmael. When we regularly do the *mitzvah* personally and give our children the opportunity to do the *mitzvah* on our behalf only once in a while, it becomes a privilege rather than an obligation. Nevertheless, Avraham was an old man and had just undergone his brit milah. Aren't we nit picking? Rabbi Zaidel Epstein z"l quoting Rav Levoitz explains that if someone does not do the work, he does not get rewarded. Hashem rewarded Avraham's descendants according to Avraham's work.

The Aderet Yosef posits that Avraham understood water to have purifying power in its own right. Therefore it wouldn't matter who brought it to wash away the idol worship of the wayfarers and bring them to a belief in God. However, bringing someone to a belief in God is a great *mitzvah* in itself and should not be delegated. Avraham's bringing the water himself would have had a greater impact and would have merited a greater reward. Moshe Rabbenu made a similar error in his reasoning when he hit the rock instead of speaking to it. Water coming from the rock, no matter how it came, would produce the same result of glorifying Hashem's name. Thus, he hit the rock and was punished for the diminished impact of the miracle. That's why Rashi chose this second verse where Hashem clearly states that Moshe failed to sanctify Him, to illustrate Avraham's omission. When we have the opportunity to do a *mitzvah*, it behooves us to be mindful of every aspect of its performance, for we cannot know what the ramifications may be in this world and in the Heavenly spheres.

Builder of Her Home Respect and Mutuality in the Home Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

A husband must give *kavod* (honor) to his wife. Otherwise she will not see the higher place within her that is like him. Both of them must express *kavod* to each other in a language that the other understands to enable mutual growth. A friend of mine's late husband would go to Rav Rubin's shiur after a long day at work. To keep himself awake he would stand the entire shiur. That dedication to *Torah* learning is something a wife could praise in her husband. And he must let her know in a language she can connect to. For a husband to want to give *kavod* to his wife more than to himself, is contingent on the wife. She has to give him *kavod*. If she doesn't feel respect for him, it's because whatever is his greatest points are not things she values. Let's say he is a man of great integrity but he's not brilliant. If all she values

is brilliance, she'll see integrity as irrelevant and she'll let him know that. Even if she won't say it outright, her expression will say it. The language of the heart is the language he will pick up. If she feels inner contempt for him he will know it and they will not share mutual goals. When the husband feels devalued and the wife feels there's nothing to share, then all the factors that could generate conflict in a marriage become much bigger than they should be. When a couple respect each other, they may have very little money, but they will not fight. The underlying need for mutual respect is the core of marriage.

When a woman takes her ability to endear what she sees in her husband to its apex, he becomes honorable in her eyes. Avigayil, who was a prophetess, admired Dovid so much

that she said, "Here I am, a maidservant. Take me as your slave." By elevating what is whole in her husband, the wife becomes a part of it, and her own *kavod* is raised. Thus in Menorot Hamoar it says, the *kavod* she gives him is what enables him to give her *kavod*. A mother said to her daughter as she was leading her to her husband's house – "Stand before him as if you were standing before a king and serve him. And if you will act as his maidservant he will become your slave." He will respect you the way he respects a royal woman. The more you make him big the more he will be big and that in turn will elevate you. This is what is meant in Tehilim, "*Ki hu adonaich v'hishtavchi lach. Kol kevuda bas melech penima.*" The more the woman gives her husband respect, the more she will be a daughter of the king.

The Treatment of G-d's Names Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Ari Jacobson

One should be careful to clear one's mouth before saying Hashem's name or kissing a *Torah* book. When referring to the name of Hashem outside the context of prayer or *Torah* study, one should say Hashem and not a corrupted version such as *Adoshem* which can be construed as disrespectful. One should be careful not to say a *bracha l'vatala* (a blessing in vain) or a *bracha sheino tzricha* (an unnecessary blessing).

The texts of our blessing were composed by the Sages a few thousand years ago. This includes the brochos that are *Torah* mandated such as *birchat hamazon* and *birchat ha'Torah*. When the Talmud mentions the prohibition of, "Do not bear Hashem's name in vain," it refers to refraining from taking an oath in a court of law, but it also includes the prohibition of reciting a *bracha sheino tziracha*. The *chachamim* limited the particular texts of the *brachot* only to be recited in a very specific context and not to be used in general praise of Hashem as a way of keeping its uniqueness.

The Kitzur writes that if a person accidentally makes an unnecessary *bracha* or a *bracha* in vain, he should recite the phrase "*Baruch shem kavod malchuso*, May His kingdom be forever." By praising Hashem, he rectifies the lack of reverence of Hashem engendered by uttering His name unnecessarily. If a person says the verse immediately, he changes the nature of the text from a self-standing *bracha* which was limited by the Rabbis into a phrase of general praise of Hashem. If one says, "*Baruch ata Hashem*," and then realizes it was in vain, one should immediately conclude "*lamdeinu chukecha*," a verse from *Tehilim*. If one mistakenly says, "*Baruch ata Hashem Elokeinu*," one should conclude with a verse in *Divrei Hayomim*, "*Yisrael avinu me'olam vad olam*," to avoid the prohibition of a *bracha sheino tzricha*.

The Shulchan Aruch discusses the custom of pouring out all the water in vessels and containers in the neighborhood of someone who passed away. Since one is not supposed to explicitly spread bad news this was a way of discreetly conveying the message of a recent

death. Another reason given according to Kabbala was that there may have been some blood from the Angel of Death mixed in with the water. If someone makes a blessing on a glass of water and then hears of a death, he should first drink a little and then pour out the water to avoid the prohibition of a *bracha* in vain. When there's only a slight danger, we apply the verse in *Kohelet*, "One engaged in a *mitzva* will be protected from evil." What if you make a *bracha* on a dairy candy bar and then realize you are fleishig? You woke up in the morning and made a *bracha* and realized it's a fast day. You made a *bracha* and then realized the food wasn't kosher. There is a long essay by Rav Ovadia Yosef in which he surveys the different approaches to the matter. According to Ashkenazi practice, an unintentional *bracha l'vatala* does not override intentionally violating a Rabbinic prohibition. Rav Ovadia Yosef quotes the Rambam that making an unnecessary *bracha* violates a *Torah* prohibition. Sefardim should consult their local Rabbi if a question arises.