

## Parshat Vayeira: Understanding Judgment

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In Parshat Vaeira, the Shem MiShmuel examines the intriguing story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*. He quotes the Midrash Tanchuma: Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai taught that in the Mishkan and *Beis Hamikdash* a *korban olah*, burnt offering, was brought to atone for bad thoughts. In the same vein, the test of *Akeidat Yitzchak* came as a result of an erroneous thought Avraham had which needed atonement. Rabbi Levi said that Avraham looked at all the blessings Hashem had given him and mistakenly thought, "Maybe I received all my reward in this world and I will not get my reward in the World to Come." Why was this thought incorrect?

The Shem MiShmuel explains that Hashem deals with this world on two levels, *din* (strict judgment) and *chesed* (loving kindness). In the beginning of Bereishit, Rashi notes that the first mention of the creation of the world uses the name *Elokim*, which connotes justice. However, subsequent references use both the names *Elokim* and *Hashem*, which connotes mercy. Originally Hashem planned to create the world solely with *din*, but he saw it would not be able to survive without *chesed*. Likewise, some *mitzvot* such as Shabbat and Kashrut correspond to *din* while others such as charity and visiting the sick correspond to *chesed*.

Similarly, in our relationship with others we must use both approaches. Although

discipline has its place, there must be room for *chesed* too. Yet many times it's unclear which path to take. Only by studying Torah and observing the ways of *tzadikim* can we get a sense of Hashem's will.

In a mysterious way, Hashem's *din* and *chesed* ultimately merge. For us it seems a paradox, how can pure justice be one with mercy, which seems to stretch the truth? Rav Soloveitchik explains, we ask Hashem in our prayers, "*Oseh shalom b'imromov hu yaseh shalom aleinu* (You who make peace above, create peace among us)." We pray to Hashem that just as *din* and *chesed* are one in heaven, let it be here on earth too. Let us understand the kindness in Your *din* and the justice in Your *chesed*.

Avraham was confused by this issue. He thought that perhaps Hashem was giving him his reward in this world so that He could punish him in the next world. Perhaps His *chesed* was really *din* and in the future he would suffer. The Rambam writes in Mishna Torah that a person should always look at himself as being on the edge, half good and half evil. If he does a *mitzvah* he leans towards righteousness and if he sins he turns towards evil. The Rambam is making a theological statement, not a psychological one.

Theoretically it's difficult to know who is a true *tzadik* or *rasha* because only Hashem knows

the truth. One good deed can outweigh thousands of misdeeds and visa versa. We don't know the repercussions of our actions. Therefore we must view ourselves in a state of limbo and do as many good deeds as possible. On a second level, this outlook should motivate us to do more *mitzvot*. But under no circumstances may a person think he is a *rasha*. This is a false idea, the work of the *yetzer hara* to make us lose faith in ourselves. On the contrary, one must believe that one's strength will ultimately overcome one's weaknesses.

Avraham's confusion of *din* and *chesed* brought on the test of the *akeidah*. The *akeidah* actualized Avraham and Yitzchak's incredible love and dedication to Hashem. It was in fact a great *chesed*. Until this point Yitzchak couldn't have children. He had a feminine soul expressed as *din* in a male body. At *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Avraham, whose male quality was *chesed*, was able to bind *chesed* and *din* and transform Yitzchak so he could build the Jewish people.

In reality Avraham was so righteous he merited both worlds. His minor failings were completely wiped away by the flood of his *chesed*. Yet Avraham was so modest he thought he deserved *din*. Hashem had to disown him of this notion and he did so through *Akeidat Yitzchak*.

## The Reason

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

In Parshat Bereishit, the Torah mentions a river that came out of *Gan Eden* which split into four rivers: *Pishon*, *Gichon*, *Chidekel*, and *Parat* (known today as the Euphrates). Later on in Devarim, the Torah refers to the fourth river *Parat* as the Great River. *Parat* is listed last on the list because it was the smallest of the four rivers. Why then does the Torah call it the Great River? Rashi explains that in Devarim the river of *Parat* is mentioned together with the land of Israel as being one of its southern borders. Therefore it was called the Great River.

Rashi notes that this can be compared to a slave and a king. Since the slave is a servant of the king he has to be respected. If the

Torah calls a river great because it was mentioned in connection with *Eretz Yisrael*, how much more so are all those who merit to live or visit the land. *Eretz Yisrael* has the quality of elevating all those who are connected to it to higher levels. Chazal tell us that a prophet can only prophesy in the land of Israel. When the prophet Yonah ran away to *Tarshish* his plan was to leave *Eretz Yisrael* so that he'd fall spiritually and not be able to receive prophesy. This teaches us the remarkable power of the land.

The Gemara in Nedarim tells the story of a group of Jews who were on their way to Israel. When they arrived in the land, there was a murder among them. One of the travelers was

the Amora Ulla who went to speak to the great Rabbi Yochanan. Rabbi Yochanan was shocked to hear the story. How could a Jew murder another Jew in Israel? Rashi explains that he was really asking, "How can it be that a Jew could get so angry that he would come to murder in Israel?" The Gemara explains that the murder happened when the travelers hadn't yet crossed the Jordan River. They were in captured land that was now considered Israel, but they hadn't actually reached the Promised Land. Rabbi Yochanan said, "Now I understand. That place is not as holy as the land of Israel." We see the incredible sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael* and the great impact it has on its inhabitants.

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The Rambam explains that Hashem appoints a special angel over each country, whose mission is to bring all the prayers of its people to Him. But in *Eretz Yisrael* there are no angels. Every prayer goes straight to Hashem.

If this is all true, why are there murders in Israel today? Why don't we sense the exceptional holiness of the land? The Midrash in Devarim Rabah explains, Moshe asked Hashem, "Why is it that Yosef's bone will merit to be buried in Israel while I will not merit to

enter the Holy Land? Hashem answered, "He who praised and was proud of the land will be buried there. He who did not, will not." After the incident between Yosef and the wife of Potifar, she said, "A Jewish man was brought here to make fun of us." Yosef replied, "I am a Jew who was taken away from the land of the Jews." He praised the place from where he had come. Therefore, he merited to be buried in Israel.

In contrast, when Moshe met Yitro, his daughters told their father, "An Egyptian man

saved us from the shepherds." Moshe did not immediately counter, "I'm a Jew." He was in danger. He had just run away from Pharaoh and couldn't reveal his identity. So he remained silent. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says it was not a punishment. It's a *metziut*, an undisputed fact, that one who doesn't praise his identity and his land cannot merit to be buried in the Holy Land. Only one who appreciates and values Israel, can sense its holiness and merit to live and be buried there.

## Forefathers on Foreign Soil: The Signs

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

What about Rachel made her succeed in arousing Hashem's mercy? Why way was her merit greater than the *avot*? The Lev Shalom explains the view of the Baalei Mussar, that although the *avot* passed great tests, their trials only lasted a certain amount of time. In contrast, Rachel's test did not end with giving over the signs to Leah. She had to face the repercussions of her actions for the rest of her life and she did so with incredible strength and self-restraint. She understood that if Leah would know the full extent of Rachel's actions, she would feel indebted to her for the rest of her life. Therefore, not only did she not mention of the story again, but she went out of her way to make Leah feel she was the mainstay of the home.

When Reuven brought the *dudaim* to his mother and Rachel asked for them, Leah said, "Is it not enough that you took my husband, do you also want to take my flowers?" And Rachel remained silent. Rav Yedid says the greatness of Rachel is reflected in *gemilut chasadim*, which comes from the root word *gimul*, to wean. The highest form of *chesed* is to do kindness and then to wean the person away from feeling indebted. Rachel was the quintessential *gomer chesed*.

The Lev Shalom asks, how do we understand Leah? Is this how a great woman speaks to her sister? The Daat Zekeinim says that the *simanim* were the three *mitzvot* of challah, family purity, and kindling the Shabbat lights.

When Yaakov agreed to marry Rachel he taught her these *halachot*. When she found out there would be a switch, Yaakov said, "I will ask questions on these *halachot* and this will be our sign that you are Rachel." When Rachel gave over these *simanim* to Leah she didn't reveal that these were the signs between her and Yaakov. She just told her that every married woman needs to know these *halachot* and Leah should know it too. She never let on to her sister the great *chesed* she had done and therefore Leah never had a feeling of inferiority.

We learn the power of *tefilah* from Leah. Not only did she not marry Esav, but she merited to marry Yaakov first. Rav Goldwicht points out that Esav and Yaakov were given two different missions. Yaakov was meant to do the *avodat hapnim*, the inner spiritual work while Esav was meant to do the *avodat hachutz*, to take the fruits of the field and elevate them for Hashem. Leah was destined for Esav while Rachel was destined for Yaakov. Leah could have prayed for Esav to repent. But when she saw that Yaakov took the blessings of Yitzchak and that even Esav's nuclear family had given up on him, she realized she needed to pray to marry Yaakov.

The Sefat Emet says that when Yaakov came in to Yitzchak he said, "*Anochi Esav bechorecha*," he meant to say, "I've taken on the cloak of Esav's responsibilities, the mission of the inner world along with the mission to elevate the outer world." At that moment he merited

Leah as his soul mate to help him complete his role. Rachel could have easily argued that she would take on a double role, but instead she gave over her role to her sister. She could've said, "Leah caused all the problems by acquiescing to Lavan instead of refusing to go to the wedding ceremony. I don't have to sacrifice myself for this." Or she could have insisted on marrying first while Leah would marry later. But she didn't. She gave up the signs and her chance at fulfilling her destiny to save her sister from shame.

Rav Goldwicht writes, it wasn't just the switching of the order of marriages, but a switching of roles for all generations. Rachel gave over her role of *avodat hapnim* to Leah and took over Leah's outer role. The central aspect of Yaakov was his inner role and whoever he married first would complement that world. The *simanim* Rachel gave over to Leah were about how to support Yaakov in that mission. Rachel, knowing the power of *tefilah* that got Leah this far could have prayed, "Let me fulfill my intended mission and let Leah marry second." But she didn't and instead gave over her rightful position with a full heart to Leah. Hashem said, "You, who didn't cry and pray then, may cease crying and praying now." The *avot* although they faced challenges, maintained their identity. But Rachel sacrificed her very identity to save her sister from shame. It is this incredible *mesirat nefesh* that will bring her children back to their borders and ultimately bring the *geulah*.