

Chassidut on the Parsha: Parshat Vayeira Chessed and Din

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In Parshat Vayeira, Hashem sends three angels to visit Avraham and Sarah. Each comes with a mission. One was charged with telling Avraham that he would have a son. This seems strange as when Hashem commanded Avraham to circumcise himself, He already told Avraham he would have Yitzchak. What was the angel's message?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Avraham was the epitome of *chesed* (kindness). The promise of Yitzchak, who personified *din* (justice), came to Avraham during his recuperation from his *brit milah* (circumcision). The Shem Mishmuel quotes the Baal Hame'or who explains that *milah* falls under the *mitzvah* of "U'be'arta hara mikerbecha. You shall remove the evil from within you." The destruction of impurity, the removal of the *orlah* (foreskin), is a manifestation of *din*.

Avraham believed in the spark of goodness within every person. No matter how evil a person may be, he can be redeemed with love and kindness. Avraham prayed for the

cruel people of Sedom even though they had no saving grace. Yet Hashem said they had to be destroyed. He gave Avraham the *mitzvah* of *milah* so that he might realize that despite the great potential of man there are some people, as the Rambam writes, who lose their humanity completely and have to be destroyed.

Hashem told Avraham, "Hit'halech lefanai vehai tamim." Walk before me and you will be perfect. Avraham's display of *chesed* had to be tempered with justice. Circumcising himself, decimating evil and thereby integrating *din* within himself, would bring him to perfection. When Avraham learned this lesson he merited to have Yitzchak.

Yitzchak's name comes from the root word *tzechok*, laughter. The *tzechok* of Yitzchak was the sweetening of his *din*. *Chesed* produces the joy of *tzechok* and he was given this name to modify his fundamental tendencies of *gevurah*. Because Avraham successfully integrated *chesed* and *din*, Yitzchak too was able to achieve this balance.

Some people have a tendency for *chesed* and some for *din* but there needs to be a balance of both. We must be firm at times and bend and give in at other times. Knowing the proper medium is a part of the greatness of the Jew and the *Torah*.

While Avraham represented *chesed*, Sarah signified *din*. We see this with the story of Yishamel. Avraham was reluctant to send him away, while Sarah insisted that he leave. Avraham attained *din* by fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *brit milah*. However, Sarah still needed to reach a level of *chesed*. In a prophetic way, she achieved this by serving the meal to the angels. Sarah baked the bread, usually eaten by day, which signifies *chesed*. She brought out the milk and butter which are white, the color of kindness. By mitigating *din* with *chesed* she could now give birth to Yitzchak.

May each of us in our own lives find the correct balance of *chesed* and *din* so that we will be worthy to sanctify Hashem's name.

Seeing is Believing: Parshat Vayeirah

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

One of the seminal events in the formation of our people was *Akedat Yitzchak*, the binding of Yitzchak. After Hashem commanded Avraham to release Yitzchak and he offered a ram in his stead, Avraham named the place "Hashem yireh," God will see," as it says, "Behar Hashem Yeirosheh." (On the mountain Hashem will be seen.) This name, together with the previous name of Shalem, the kingdom of Melchizedek, form the name by which we know the place forever, Yerushalayim, Jerusalem.

In our liturgy, we constantly call upon Yerushalayim. We pray facing this place. For as the *Leket Imrei Kodesh* says, it is a magnet for our tefillot, the central portal through which our prayers rise up to heaven. What unique qualities can we attribute to this place that it is forever known both as the place Hashem will see and the place that Hashem will be seen, and how have Avraham Avinu's actions

impacted these results?

Perhaps, as Rav Eliezer Azikari suggests in the haunting lines of *Yedid Nefesh*, the twofold name is the way we relate to Hashem. We want to draw closer To Him, but we cannot do it alone. So we ask "Draw me, Your servant, after Your will so that I may run like a ram and bow before Your glory." Perhaps the ram alludes to *Akedat Yitzchak*. Avraham ran to fulfill God's command, and then substituted the ram for Yitzchak although it wasn't required of him. So too we tell Hashem, "When we take the initiative to come closer to You and ask that You be revealed to us, that is proof that we truly want the intimate relationship with You." Rav Wolbe explains that Avraham's action exemplifies the essence of love. When one loves someone one wants to give above and beyond what is expected. This desire is what cements a relationship, and is what Avraham exhibited when he searched for a way to offer God another gift.

The *Mikdash Halevi* notes that *Har Hamoriah* retains its sanctity forever while Mount Sinai's sanctity was ephemeral. Avraham Avinu was an active participant in creating and maintaining the relationship between himself and *Hakodosh Boruch Hu*, as the Jews later were when they offered sacrifices in the *beit hamikdash*. By contrast, as great as the experience at Mount Sinia was, we were passive onlookers.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch uses this idea to highlight the difference between Man and animals. Animals receive their needs from a benevolent God without having to invest anything. Adam, however, was put into this world *leovdah uleshamrah*, to work it and protect it. Man has a responsibility of service to his Creator and to the world He created. Therefore he can achieve a greater level of intimacy with Him.

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The *Chayei Moshe* notes that each name bears a different timestamp. During the time of the *beit hamikdosh*, the site was called *har habayit*, the mountain upon which the Temple stood. After the destruction, it became *makom*, a place. Avraham calls it the place God will see. He asks Hashem to allow His presence to rest here even when the *beit hamikdosh* no longer exists until *hayom*, the day when *Moshiach* will come and His presence will be revealed to all.

In the merit of the *akedah*, says Rav Hirsch, Israel was given the opportunity to offer the twice daily offering in the Temple. The sheep for these offerings was slaughtered to the north of the altar, *tzafon*, the side which represents that which is *tzafun*, hidden. This signifies that even when things are hidden

from us, when we feel alone and distant from Hashem, He is watching over us. The *Netivot Shalom* points out that this is the lesson of the *Akedah*. When things seem darkest, Hashem is right there beside us. On a personal level, exile is a sense of alienation and aloneness. Jews have survived unspeakable hardships, but the one thing they cannot bear is banishment from God's presence. Hashem says, *Anochi haster astir*. Even when I will hide My face, I will still be found there with you. During those dark times, we ask Hashem to shine His countenance upon us so that we may feel His presence. When we sense God holding our hand, life and its struggles take on a whole new dimension.

Holiness exists not only on the mountain but within each of us. As Rabbi Pincus reminds us,

God said, "Build for Me a sanctuary that I may dwell within them, within the souls of Bnei Yisroel." Through personal dedication and toil in *Torah* and *mitzvot*, we build the sanctuary for His presence within ourselves. Self sacrifice for Hashem seldom means dying for His name; it means living according to His will. It's not just about doing the minimum requirement, says Rabbi Adler, but performing the *mitzvot* to the best of one's ability.

Rabbi Pincus notes that just as we guarded the physical edifice of the sanctuary against defilement, so too should we guard our inner spiritual sanctuary. By keeping our mouths pure, our hearts from covetousness, our eyes from impure images, we will retain the holiness within our souls and recognize His presence in our lives.

Owning Our Actions

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

"They will not despise a thief if he steals to sate his appetite, for he is hungry. And if he is found, he will pay sevenfold; he must give all he owns." A thief is in danger of losing his identity. He can give himself over totally to the desire for theft because of his great hunger and thereby lose everything real and enduring including his portion in the World to Come.

"One who commits adultery with a woman is devoid of sense; one who would destroy his soul-he will do it." If you give succumb to your desires, you end up escaping from yourself and are left with no direction or emotional capacity. When you adapt that which is foreign, you lose your heart and the way you define specific aspects of the soul.

The soul has five levels, *yechida*, *chaya*, *neshama*, *ruach* and *nefesh*. Hashem's image flows through us from a more vivid state to a state where we experience it only via our bodies which is called *nefesh*. The *neshama*

is always pure, but when it rests in the walls of the body it can end up in a state of lack of selfknowledge where you become almost unaware of your soul. The animal self is not evil. It could be adapted and elevated so that it is controlled by the spiritual self. Picture young children baking cookies for *Shabbat*.

Although, they want the cookies, if they are listening to *Shabbat* music in the background and have in mind that it is *l'kevod Shabbat*, it's a whole different experience.

There's also the possibility of the *neshama* becoming tameh- blocked. However, Hashem didn't create us for failure. The *Baal Halashem* says that nobody remains permanently blocked. In this world you could open yourself to a redefinition of self. You could find yourself standing on burning coals and that could awaken you to ask yourself-Why am I here? This happened to Menashe Hamelech. He was a terrible sinner. But when he went through suffering, he began to pray and repent.

Atonement can happen through suffering in this world or *gehinom* in the next world, where the soul is purified. But in the end, everyone will have what the *Baal Haleshem* calls *Chemdat Yisrael*.

The Gra explains that when *Mishlei* speaks about the destruction of the soul it refers to *gehinom* which destroys the aspect of self that is tameh. It's a painful loss, because you've identified with it for so long. *Gehinom* has a finite span, described as 12 months, which parallels the 12 *mazalot*. *Mazal* refers to the way Hashem pours down what will be a person's ultimate fate, the background of his life, who he could've been. You're accountable for all of that, and there in *gehinom* it will be an intense and difficult process through which the soul will lose the *tumah* inside itself, the attachments to *isha nachriyah* and all that is foreign. Then the soul will be free to be who it could've been all along and will merit the state of *Chemdat Yisrael*.