Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

תורת אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

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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*.

Mesilat Yesharim: Honoring the Mitzvot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Mesilat Yesharim writes that *yirah* (fear) and *ahavah* (love) are two basic foundations of *chassidut*. *Yirat Hashem* connotes not only fear of Hashem as it relates to punishment but *yirat haromemut*, seeing the greatness of Hashem in this world. Honoring and beautifying the *mitzvot* demonstrates one's *yirat* and *ahavat Hashem*.

The Mesilat Yesharim discusses honoring Shabbbat and Yom tov. There are 39 *melochot* that are forbidden on *Shabbat*. They are based on the work that Bnei Yisrael did when they built the *mishkan*.

There is an additional aspect of "*V'shamru bnei Yisrael et haShabbat lasot et haShabbat*." How does one make the *Shabbat* if the *kedusha* (sanctity) of the day comes on its own? The Mesilat Yesharim tells us we can do so by personally involving ourselves in the preparation. This is *kavod Shabbat.* The Gemara in Shabbat tells how Rav Avuhu would sit on an ivory stool and fan the fire, Rava salted fish, Rav Huna lit candles *erev Shabbat*. Rav Papa made wicks for the candles, Rav Chisda would cut beets, Rabi and Rav Yosef would chop wood, and Rav Nachman would carry bundles of necessities in and out of the home before *Shabbat*. What is the Gemara and Mesilat Yesharim teling us? When it comes to *Shabbat* one should not rely on hired help or one's wife but one should prepare oneself. A person cannot do this obligation by appointing an agent. *Kavod Shabbat* is a *mitzvah sh'begufo* that one must personally perform.

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Parshat Veyeira: Honing Hospitality

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

After Avraham Avinu fulfilled the *mitzva* of *brit milah*, Hashem came to visit him. Spotting three Arabs coming down the road, Avraham ran to invite them. The commentators ask, how could Avraham leave God's sacred presence to tend to these idol worshipers? It seems counterintuitive- after all the goal of *mitzvah* performance to form a connection to *Hashem*. It would seem that Avraham had now already reached that goal, writes the *Ben Melech*. However, the ultimate goal is to be achieved in *olam habo.* In this world we must continue to perform *mitzvot*, for that is how we greet the Divine Presence in this world, adds *Daas Torah.* When we realize this, notes Rabbi Goldstein, we begin to appreciate every opportunity to do a *mitzvah*, for it will no longer be available to us in the next world. The streets are lined with *mitzvot* if we but open our eyes to see, writes Rabbi Wolbe. We must train ourselves by doing more and more "small" *mitzvot* to develop a *mitzvah* mentality

Avraham wanted to earn Hashem's presence through his own effort in performing a *mitzvah* rather than through *Hashem*'s kindness, writes the *Ohel Moshe*. Leaving *Hashem*'s presence to work on a *mitzvah* was not at all disrespectful then. *Mitzvah* is related to *tzavta*- connection. *Mitzvah* performance surrounds us with an aura of God's presence. While we understand this connection through the teachings of our Sages, how did *Avraham Avinu* arrive at this understanding?

Avraham knew his mission was to spread belief in and closeness to *Hashem* among the people. However, now having been circumcised, he was different from others not only philosophically and spiritually, but also physically. He was afraid this would keep others away from him, writes Rabbi M. Miller. Therefore, *Hashem* sent him these strangers to raise his spirits and show him he could still communicate his message to others.

While Avraham was sitting, *Hashem* (so to speak) was standing nearby, teaching Avraham that although God is always present in a Jewish court of law, the judges are seated, giving their full attention to rendering proper judgment and not being distracted by the awe of God's presence. *Hashem*'s presence is not meant to distract us from proper performance of *mitzvot*. Avraham thus understood that he was not disrespecting *Hashem* by going out to perform one of His *mitzvot*.

Rabbi Scheinerman quotes Rav Shach, that since every human being was created in God's image, we are not disrespecting God when we do acts of *chesed*, but respecting His image within the other human being and further honoring Hashem by emulating Hashem's chesed to us. In fact, adds Rabbi Beyfus, emulating Hashem is a continuous obligation, and we are not putting Hashem on hold, but clinging to Him. Just as the world was created through *Hashem's chesed*, so must we continue to uphold the world through *chesed*. When do *chesed*, we are actualizing the image of God within ourselves. When Avraham Avinu was greeting these guests, he was creating an even closer connection to Hashem.

Einei Yisroel notes that Hashem appeared to *Avraham Avinu* specifically through an act of *chesed* to teach us that we bring Hashem's presence to the world through our acts of *chesed*. Every time Avraham extended hospitality, he would bring recognition of *Hashem* to his guests' consciousness. He would impress upon them that everything he offered them was actually not his, but gifts from *Hashem* Himself.

After his bris, Avraham became a human receptacle of Divine holiness writes the *Tosher Rebbe*. That's why Hashem initially kept impure people away from him. But Avraham was extremely distressed. When one can bring others to recognize their Creator, one is increasing Hashem's presence in the world. That's why one can take time from one's personal spiritual activities for the *mitzvah* of bringing others closer to Hashem. However, *Chochmat Hamatzpun* posts a caveat that this is only when no one else can perform that task.

The Ner Uziel writes that after his circumcision, Avraham's bond with Hashem intensified as he sensed Hashem's presence most keenly, basking in its joy. However, when the three strangers appeared, Avraham knew the right thing to do was to invite them in. One's relationship with others is not separate from, but an integral part of one's relationship to God.

With Avraham's heightened spiritual sensibility, he would see only that which was relevant to his spiritual growth adds the *Kedushas Zion.* If Avraham saw the men approaching, surely Hashem meant for him to approach them and offer them hospitality.

The Oshover Rebbe, citing the Shla"h Hakadosh writes that Avraham Avinu was having a tremendously elevated experience with Hashem and he felt a danger that he would become haughty. Taking care of guests in the most mundane ways would remind him that he himself was merely a guest in Hashem's house, living in this world by dint of his *chesed*. So too, we are all guests of Hashem, and the best way to feel the love and concern of our Host is to emulate His *chesed* and extend kindness to all who were created in His image.

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