

# Torah Weekly

778

November 1-7, 2020  
14-20 Cheshvan, 5781

Torah reading:  
Vayeira: Genesis 18:1 - 22:24  
Haftarah: Kings II 4:1-37

## PARSHAT VAYEIRA

### Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

### Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

### Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

## Why Ishmael Was Rejected

This week's Parshah describes the bitter tension in Abraham's home. Underlying the tension was the question of succession: which of Abraham's two children would be the one chosen to carry on his legacy. Each of the patriarchs of the Jewish people, explain the Kabbalists, personify one of three basic emotions. Abraham personified the emotion of kindness; Isaac personified awe; and Jacob personified compassion. Being that they are our ancestors, of us contains a part of them in our spiritual makeup.

Reading the stories of Abraham, the theme of kindness appears again and again. Abraham made it his life's mission is to invite travelers into his tent. He loved all people. He prayed to G-d to save the wicked people of Sodom.

Abraham's oldest child, Ishmael (the son of Hagar, the maidservant he married at the request of his wife, Sarah), also embodied kindness. Abraham therefore felt a unique connection to Ishmael. Not only was Ishmael his oldest son, but Ishmael also shared his passion for kindness, leading Abraham to hope that Ishmael would be the one to carry on his legacy. That was not meant to be. In this week's portion we read about Sarah pressuring Abraham to send Ishmael away, as she felt he was a bad influence on her son, Isaac. G-d instructs Abraham to listen to Sarah, leaving him no choice but to expel his own son from his home. G-d reassures Abraham that Ishmael would be blessed, but also makes it clear that Isaac would be Abraham's spiritual heir, the one who would carry on his legacy.

Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, making merry. And Sarah said to Abraham, "Drive

out this handmaid and her son, for the son of this handmaid shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac." But the matter greatly displeased Abraham, concerning his son. And G-d said to Abraham, "Be not displeased concerning the lad and concerning your handmaid; whatever Sarah tells you, hearken to her voice, for in Isaac will be called your seed. But also the son of the handmaid I will make into a nation, because he is your seed." (Genesis 21:9-13.) Observing both of Abraham's sons, it seems that Ishmael should have been the one to carry on the legacy of his father. After all, Ishmael shared the attribute of kindness with his father, while Isaac (who embodied the attribute of awe and fear) seemed to be very different. Why then was Isaac chosen? While Abraham and Ishmael both performed kindness, the motivating force behind their actions could not be further apart. Once we examine the motivation behind Abraham's kindness, we will see that Isaac was much closer to Abraham than Ishmael could ever be. There are two types of motivation for kindness. (See *Or Hatorah, Vayeira*, p. 93.) Abraham's kindness was motivated by his humility. As Abraham says while praying for the people of Sodom, "I am but dust and ashes." (Genesis 18:27.) The humble person perceives everyone else as being greater than him. When he sees someone else in need, he will do anything in his power to help the stranger who, the humble person believes, is more deserving than him. This was the kindness of Abraham. On the other hand, Ishmael's kindness was not motivated by humility, but by arrogance. Ishmael felt that because he was greater than the people around him, he should be the one to provide for them, so that his superiority would be apparent. His kindness did not lead him closer to people. His kindness,

fueled by his arrogance, pushed him farther away from the very people he helped.

G-d's message to Abraham was that Jewish kindness must be motivated by humility, not by arrogance. Therefore, the son best suited to carry on Abraham's legacy, was Isaac, who embodied the attribute of awe and fear, qualities which, rooted in humility, make him like his father Abraham. (*Yes, Isaac is more reserved. Isaac does not always jump in to the rescue. Isaac motivates a people to help themselves. Isaac is filled with humility. He sees the great potential within others, and that, in some case, true kindness is allowing others to solve their problems on their own. This, however, is a subject for another essay.*) By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

**A Jew's Gotta Do** Is it a sin to argue with G-d? Is it sacrilegious to question the Divine? Well, Abraham did it. Not for himself, but on behalf of the people of Sodom, whom G-d had decided to destroy because of their wickedness. Abraham was the paragon of *chesed*, the personification of kindness and compassion. He grappled with the Almighty, attempting to negotiate a stay of execution for the inhabitants of the notorious cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?" he asks G-d. "Will the judge of all the earth not do justice?" "If there are 50 righteous men, will you spare them? 45? 40... 30... 20... 10?" In the end, Abraham cannot find even a *minyan* of righteous men in the cities and he gives up. And then the verse reads, *V'Avraham shov l'mkomo* — "And Abraham went back to his place." Having failed in his valiant attempt, he acknowledges defeat and retreats to his corner.

But there is also an alternative interpretation to those last words. *And Abraham went back*

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to his place can also be understood to mean that he went back to his ways, to his custom. And what custom is that? To defend the underdog, to look out for the needy and to help those in trouble, even if they are not the most righteous of people. Abraham refused to become disillusioned in defeat. He went right back to his ways, even though this particular attempt did not meet with success.

What happens when we lose? We hurt, we sulk, and we give up. It didn't work, it's no use. It's futile, why bother? Just throw in the towel.

Not Abraham. Abraham stuck to his principles. He may have

experienced a setback, but he would still champion the cause of justice. He would still speak out for those in peril. And he would still take his case to the highest authority in the universe, G-d Almighty Himself.

Abraham teaches us not to lose faith, not to deviate from our chosen path or our sincerely held convictions. If we believe it is the right thing to do, then it is right even if there is no reward in sight. If it is right, then stick to it, no matter the outcome.

One of my favorite cartoon characters is good old Charlie Brown in *Peanuts*. In one strip that sticks in my memory there is a storm raging outside and Charlie Brown is determined to go out to fly his kite. His friends tell him he must be crazy to attempt flying a kite in this weather, it'll be destroyed by the wind in no time. But in the last frame we see Charlie, resolutely marching out the door, his kite firmly tucked under his arm, and the caption reads, "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

Do we believe in our principles of faith because of expediency? Are we virtuous because we believe it is the way to the good life? Are we waiting for the big payoff for our good behavior? What happens when we don't see it? Do we become frustrated, disillusioned and angry at G-d?

Some people become religious for the wrong reasons. They are looking for some magical solution to their problems in life. And when the problems don't disappear as quickly or as magically as they expected, they give up their religious lifestyle. It didn't work; I'm outta here.

Virtue is its own reward. Sleeping better at night because our conscience is clear is also part of the deal. Or, in the words of the Sages, "the reward for a mitzvah is the mitzvah."

Our founding father reminds us that *a Jew's gotta do what a Jew's gotta do*, regardless of the outcome. Whether we see the fruits of our labors or not, if it's the right thing to do, then carry on doing it.

May we all be true children of Abraham.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, November 1, 2020 --- 14 Cheshvan, 5781**

### **Jews of Prague Saved (1620)**

In May 1618, the Bohemian Revolt broke out in Prague, triggering the Thirty Years' War. In November 1620, King Ferdinand II suppressed the rebels in Prague in the Battle of White Mountain. Notwithstanding the widespread looting, the king gave orders that no Jew be harmed. To commemorate the miraculous turn of events, R. Yomtov Lipman Heller, rabbi of Prague, instituted penitential prayers to be said every year on the 14<sup>th</sup> of MarCheshvan, which he published in Prague later that year. (The above account was recorded by R. Yomtov in his introduction to the publication.)

**Monday, November 2, 2020 --- 15 Cheshvan, 5781**

### **Passing of Mattityahu (139 BCE)**

In the 2nd century before the common era, the Holy Land was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks) who, with the collaboration of the Jewish Hellenists, introduced pagan idols into the Holy Temple and set about to forcefully Hellenize the people of Israel. Mattityahu, the son of the High Priest Yochanan, was already an old man when he picked up a sword and raised the flag of revolt in the village of Modiin in the Judean hills. Many rallied under his cry, "Who that is for G-d, come with me!" and resisted and battled the Greeks from their mountain hideouts.

After heading the revolt for one year, Mattityahu died on the 15th of Cheshvan of the year 3622 from creation (139 BCE). His five sons -- the "Macabees" Judah, Yochanan, Shimon, Elazar and Yonatan -- carried on the battle to their eventual victory, celebrated each year since by Jews the world over with the festival of Chanukah.

**Tuesday, November 3, 2020 --- 16 Cheshvan, 5781**

### **R. Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch Leaves the Town of Lubavitch (1915)**

With the approach of the German army during World War I, R. Sholom DovBer and his family left Lubavitch, located in modern-day Belarus, for the city of Rostov. Lubavitch was the seat of the Chabad movement for 102 years, starting when R. DovBer, second Chabad Rebbe, settled there in 1813.

**Wednesday, November 4, 2020 --- 17 Cheshvan, 5781**

### **Great Flood Begins (2105 BCE)**

The rains began to fall on the 17th of Cheshvan of the year 1656 from creation (2105), flooding the earth and rising above the highest mountains. Only Noah and his family survived, in the ark built to that end by Divine command, and a pair of each animal species, who entered with him into the ark.

**Shabbat, November 7, 2020 --- 20 Cheshvan, 5781**

### **Birth of Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch (1860)**

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn (known by the acronym "Rashab"), was born on the 20th of Cheshvan of the year 5621 from creation (1860).

After the passing of his father, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, in 1882, Rabbi Sholom DovBer assumed the leadership of the movement. Over the next 38 years, he wrote and delivered some 2,000 *maamarim* (discourses of Chassidic teaching) including the famed *hemshechim* (serialized discourses) which contain his profound analytical treatment of Chabad Chassidism. In 1897, he established the *Tomchei Temimim* yeshivah in Lubavitch, the first institution of Jewish learning to integrate the "body" (Talmudic and legal studies) and "soul" (philosophic and mystical) of Torah into a cohesive, living whole; it was this unique form of education and Torah study that produced the "Temimim" -- the army of learned, inspired and devoted torchbearers who, in the decades to come, would literally give their lives to keep Judaism alive under Soviet rule.

In 1915 Rabbi Sholom DovBer was forced to flee Lubavitch from the advancing WWI front and settled in Rostov-on-Don in southern Russia. In his final years, he began the heroic battle -- carried on under the leadership of his son and successor, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn -- against the new Communist regime's efforts to destroy the Jewish faith. Rabbi Sholom DovBer passed away in Rostov in 1920.