

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

October 29-31/1-4
November 2023
14-20 Cheshvan, 5784

Torah: 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 Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org

Current Events

On Simchas Torah – the joyous holiday we celebrate by dancing with the Torah scrolls – our brethren in the Holyland were savagely beaten, murdered and raped. I have not reported any of this, as I feel we are not a new media station, and this newsletter is not intended to be your source of news. However, I have been asked to insert something, as we did on the videos.

We have to remember, as pained as we are by these savage acts, we are here on this world with a mission, yes, we have been thru this before, our teachers over the centuries have reminded us and guided us, that our focus and mission has to be, to increase in acts of love and kindness to those around us. To bring more light into this world, to recognize that even a small candle dispels a lot of darkness. By doing another mitzvah, by helping those around us to do a good deed makes this world a better place and assists our brethren in battle and those suffering more than we can imagine.

So now is the time to sign up, by writing to us, for one of our Torah correspondence courses, and in the merit of learning Torah, you will make the difference and bring the ultimate peace to the world, which will be thru the coming of Moshiach.

By Rabbi Vogel

From a letter of the Rebbe to an Israeli professor:

You write that the *geulah* cannot be complete until "there will no longer be needy people upon the earth" (Deuteronomy 15:11) and all people will work collectively with shared responsibility so that there will be no distinctions of poor and rich.

I do not agree. Human nature is such that we only feel fully satisfied when we are able to help someone else. And that is only possible when one person is rich and another is poor.

Yet there is no contradiction here, and you are correct when you say that it really is unjust for society to be divided into those who have and those who have not.

You see, as explained in the teachings of Chassidut, every created being, as long as it behaves the way it was created to behave, not only receives,

but also contributes to its environment.

The same here: If someone is a needy recipient in one aspect, that same person is a wealthy provider in some other aspect.

This truth is so universal, it extends to the ultimate extreme: Even when it comes to the Creator and Director of the Universe Himself, the Torah tells us, figuratively speaking, that He too is also sometimes a recipient, and not just a provider.

This is explained in works of Chassidut on the verse, "You yearn for the work of Your own hands." In a certain way, we can say that the Creator yearns for His creations to make His presence tangible in His world.

Then there is the Chassidic commentary on the language of our sages, "Our service is needed above." He has so chosen, after all, to rely on us small creatures to do His mitzvahs and thereby complete His creation.

G-d and Strangers

G-d appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the

day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men were standing over against him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent entrance, and bowed down to the earth... Thus Parashat Vayera opens with one of the most famous scenes in the Bible: Abraham's. The text calls them men; we later discover they were angels meeting with the three enigmatic strangers. The text calls them men. We later discover that they were in fact angels, each with a specific mission. The chapter at first glance seems simple, almost fable-like. It is, however, complex and ambiguous. It consists of three sections:

Verse 1: G-d appears to Abraham.

Verses 2-16 : Abraham meets the men/angels.

Verses 17-33: The dialogue between G-d and Abraham about the fate of Sodom. The relationship between these sections is far from clear. Do they represent one scene, two or three? The most obvious possibility is three. Each of the above sections is a separate event. First, G-d appears to Abraham, as Rashi explains, "to visit the sick" after Abraham's circumcision. Then the visitors arrive with the news that Sarah will have a child. Then takes

place the great dialogue about justice and the imminent punishment of the people of Sodom.

Maimonides suggests that there are only two scenes: The visit of the angels, and the dialogue with G-d. The first verse does not describe an event at all; it is, rather, a chapter heading.³ It tells us that the events that follow are all part of a prophetic revelation, a divine-human encounter. The third possibility is that we have a single continuous scene. G-d appears to Abraham, but before He can speak, Abraham sees the passers-by and asks G-d to wait while he serves them food. Only when they have departed – in verse 17 – does he turn to G-d, and the conversation begins. The interpretation of the chapter affects – and hinges upon – the way we translate the word Adonai in Abraham's appeal: "Please Adonai, if now I have found favour in your sight, do not pass by, I pray you, from your servant."⁴ Adonai can be a reference to one of the names of G-d. It can also be read as "my L-rds" or "sirs." In the first case, Abraham would be addressing G-d. In the second, he would be speaking to the passers-by. The same linguistic ambiguity appears in the next chapter, when two of Abraham's visitors – now described as angels – visit Lot in Sodom. And the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot sat by the city gates. When he saw them, he rose to meet them and bowing low, he said, "I pray you now, adonai, turn aside to your servant's house and tarry all night and bathe your feet and you shall rise up early and go on your way."⁵ As there is no contextual element to suggest that Lot might be speaking to G-d, it seems clear, in this case, that adonai refers to the visitors. The simplest reading then of both texts – the one concerning Abraham, the other, Lot – would be to read the word consistently as "sirs." Several English translations indeed take this approach. Here, for example, is the New English Bible's: The L-rd appeared to Abraham... He looked up, and saw three men standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the opening of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. "Sirs," he said, "if I have deserved your favour, do not pass by my humble self without a visit.



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Jewish tradition, however, does not. Normally, differences of interpretation of biblical narrative have no halakhic implications. They are matters of legitimate disagreement. This case of Abraham's addressee is unusual, however, because if we translate Adonai as "G-d," it is a holy name, and both the writing of the word by a scribe, and the way we treat a parchment or document containing it, have special stringencies in Jewish law. If, by contrast, we translate it as "my L-rds" or "sirs," it has no special sanctity. Jewish law rules that in the scene with Lot, adonai is read as "sirs," but in the case of Abraham it is read as "G-d." This is an extraordinary fact, because it suggests that Abraham actually interrupted G-d as He was about to speak, asking Him to wait while he attended to the visitors. According to tradition, the passage should be read thus: The L-rd appeared to Abraham...He looked up and saw three men standing over against him. On seeing them, he hurried from his tent door to meet them, and bowed down. [Turning to G-d] he said: "My G-d, if I have found favour in Your eyes, do not leave Your servant [i.e. Please wait until I have given hospitality to these men]." [He then turned to the men and said:] "Let me send for some water so that you may bathe your feet and rest under this tree..." This daring interpretation became the basis for a principle in Judaism: "Greater is hospitality than receiving the Divine Presence."⁷ Faced with a choice between listening to G-d, and offering hospitality to what seemed to be human beings, Abraham chose the latter. G-d acceded to his request, and waited while Abraham brought the visitors food and drink, before engaging him in dialogue about the fate of Sodom. How can this be so? It seems disrespectful at best, heretical at worst, to put the needs of human beings before attending on the presence of G-d. What the passage is telling us, though, is something. The forces of nature are impersonal of immense profundity. The idolaters of Abraham's time worshipped the sun, the stars, and the forces of nature as G-ds. They worshipped power and the powerful. Abraham knew, however, that G-d is not in nature but beyond nature. There is only one thing in the universe on which He has set His image: the human person, every person, powerful and powerless alike. The forces of nature are impersonal, which is why those who worship them eventually lose their humanity. As the book of Psalms puts it: Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nostrils but cannot smell... They that make them become like them, and so do all who put their trust in them. One cannot worship impersonal forces and remain a person; compassionate, humane, generous, forgiving. Precisely because we believe that G-d is personal, someone to whom we can say "You," we honour human dignity as sacrosanct. Abraham, father of monotheism, knew the paradoxical truth that to live the life of faith is to see the trace of G-d in the face of the stranger. It is easy to receive the Divine Presence when G-d appears as G-d. What is difficult is to sense the Divine Presence when it comes disguised as three anonymous passers-by. That was Abraham's greatness. He knew that serving G-d and offering hospitality to strangers were not two things but one. In one of the most beautiful comments on this episode, Rabbi Shalom of Belz notes that in verse 2, the visitors are spoken of as standing above Abraham (nitzavim alav), while in verse 8, Abraham is described as standing above them (omed aleihem). At first, the visitors were higher than Abraham because they were angels and he a mere human being. But when he gave them food and drink and shelter, he stood even higher than the angels. By choosing the most radical of the three possible interpretations of Genesis 18, the sages allowed us to hear one of the most fundamental principles of the life of faith: We honor G-d by honoring His image, humankind.

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, October 29, 2023-14 Cheshvan, 5784

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 14th of MarCheshvan.

Monday, October 30, 2023-15 Cheshvan, 5784

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... After heading the revolt for one year, Mattityahu died on the 15th of Cheshvan of the year 3622 from creation (139 BCE).

Kristallnacht (1938)

On this night in 1938 and continuing into the next day -- November 9 on the secular calendar -- the Nazis coordinated vicious pogroms against the Jewish community of Germany. Encouraged by their leaders, rioters attacked and beat Jewish residents, burned and destroyed 267 synagogues, vandalized 7,500 Jewish businesses, and ransacked countless Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, schools, and homes, while police and firefighters stood by. Ninety-one Jews were killed and 20,000 others were deported to concentration camps. These pogroms, which collectively came to be known as Kristallnacht ("night of broken glass," referring to the thousands of windows that were broken) were a turning point after which Nazi anti-Jewish policy

King Yeravam Declares a Pseudo-Sukkot (c. -797)

The evil King Yeravam of Israel declared a holiday on this day, one month after Sukkot, where offerings were brought in his idolatrous temple. As told in I Kings 12, this was part of his campaign to distance the people from the Temple service, which took place in Jerusalem, which was ruled by Rechavam, David's grandson.

Tuesday, O October 31, 2023-16 Cheshvan, 5784

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 Russia near the border of 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 1, 2023-17 Cheshvan, 5784

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. The following is a chronology of the Flood, as indicated by the dates and time periods given in the Torah's account and calculated by Rashi:

Thursday, November 2, 2023-18 Cheshvan, 5784

Assassination of Meir Kahane

Born in 1932, Meir Kahane was a controversial American-Israeli rabbi and activist. In 1968, he founded the Jewish Defense League in New York. With the motto of "Never Again," the stated goal of the organization was to protect Jews from anti-Semitism in all its forms. In 1990, after concluding a speech in a Manhattan hotel, Kahane was fatally shot by an Egyptian-born terrorist. While strangely acquitted of the murder, El Sayyid Nosair was later convicted in relation to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Pittsburgh Tree of Life Massacre

On Shabbat morning, Cheshvan 18, 5779 (Oct. 27, 2018), Pittsburgh's peaceful Jewish enclave of Squirrel Hill was shattered by gunshots as a crazed anti-Semite attacked worshippers at the Tree of Life congregation, killing 11.

Shabbat, November 4, 2023-20 Cheshvan, 5784

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). 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.

Passing of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (2020)

An international religious leader, philosopher, and respected moral voice, he was the author of over 30 books, served as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013 and took his seat in the House of Lords in October 2009.