

Torah Weekly

ד'תשפ"ו

Parshat Vayeira
October 31, 2026
Cheshvan 20, 5787
Genesis 18:1-22:24
II Kings 4:1 - 37

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 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.

Yossy Goldman

Climb Down from Your Pedestal

It is a part of life. Whether we wish to or not, we're still constantly judging people and things. And for most of us, we like to think that we're just "calling balls and strikes," fairly and objectively calling the reality as it is. But is that always the best way to go about it?

Parshat Vayera tells the story of the infamous twin cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. These cesspools of corruption and cruelty were finally destroyed in a pillage of fire and sulfur.

But before G-d decides to flatten them once and for all, we read:

G-d said, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah has become great; their sin has become very grave. I will descend now and see, whether according to her cry, which has come to Me, they have done; [I will wreak] destruction [upon them]."

It was as if the jury was still out, and G-d needed to take a first-hand look to see whether or not the blood-curdling cries coming from below warranted their destruction.

But what does that actually mean? Why does G-d need to "go down" and see? Does He not know from on High? What, exactly, was He trying to ascertain?

Most things in this world can be viewed in different ways. It almost always depends on the observer and his or her natural tendencies.

Take the notion of determining whether or not someone or something is guilty or innocent: it's almost never *absolute*. Rarely is there an objective verdict upon which all can unanimously agree. And it's not only due to the ambiguity of evidence, or the defendants, or other external factors. Even in cases where it's plainly clear what really happened, not everyone will agree to the verdict.

It boils down to the person's tendency; are they naturally inclined to be forgiving, or the opposite? Those with a more naturally generous disposition will inevitably be inclined to be more lenient and render an innocent verdict. And of course, people born with a sterner, more disciplinary approach will more often than not decree, "guilty, no good!" We convince ourselves that we're objective arbiters of reality, but we're not. If we're "calling balls and strikes," it's based on how much we like the guy in the batter's box.

That's why the Torah is so keen against taking bribery. The moment a judge takes a bribe, their perspective changes. They are subjectively predisposed to the gift-giver, no matter how much they consciously convince themselves they're trying to be objective. The subconscious takes over and automatically predisposes them to favor that person.

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).

Sacred material please do not desecrate

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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Back to the discussion about Sodom.

G-d is, of course, beyond all descriptions, in every place in every time, and aware of all things. So when G-d “descends” to “see,” it cannot be that he was previously not present and unaware. Rather, the Torah is using this terminology to teach us a lesson on how to approach others.

One could view G-d as aloof from this world, so to speak, far removed from the particulars of Creation. He doesn't specifically *care* about what goes on here.

So, when G-d “hears about” Sodom and how evil they are, He is an objective party. In fact, G-d is the ultimate objective party, for He is so far removed from the subject at hand, and of course, with no obvious “predisposition.” And from that perspective, the verdict is crystal clear: The citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah deserve to be obliterated.

But it's easy to write a death sentence from afar. It's easy to write off someone—an entire city! —as guilty without knowing them, feeling them, hearing them, or caring about them.

By “descending” G-d was teaching us a major lesson. Don't simply write off an entire city without taking a walk through its Main Street and getting a feel for the actual humans who lived there.

So He said, “Let me go down and see. Let me climb down and become a subjective viewer, as it were, to go to a place where I begin to ‘care’ about these people and their fortune. Let me see if even in that place, the cries that I'm hearing are really as terrible and guilty as they sound.”

The sad news was that even in such an empathetic place, the citizens of Sodom deserved the death penalty. So that's what they got—but not before G-d taught us the importance of taking the time to relate to them.

We are taught to emulate G-d, and this is a prime example: Don't pass judgment on someone before you take the time to care about them. Don't be harsh or discipline too quickly before you walk a mile in their shoes and over the blocks of their Main Street.

If G-d showed that He entertained the notion that perhaps the hair-raising cries he heard weren't as guilty as they sounded once He “went down” to hear better, you should probably do the same.

Think again about that person you know who just seems to be off, the person who every day does another silly thing or says something to upset yet another person in your neighborhood. Take a second look at your spouse, children, siblings, parents, or other acquaintances who are doing terrible things, and take some time to actually care about them, to listen to their stories, their struggles, and their frustrations. Take the time and put in the hard work to climb down from your pedestal and put yourself in a space where who they are and what they dream of matters.

Quite possibly, once you do all that, you may not find them as guilty as you once thought they were.

Aharon Loschak

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, October 25, 2026
14 Cheshvan, 5787

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.

Monday, October 26, 2026
15 Cheshvan, 5787

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 intensified.

Tuesday, October 27, 2026
16 Cheshvan, 5787

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, October 28, 2026
17 Cheshvan, 5787

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.

Thursday, October 29, 2026
18 Cheshvan, 5787

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. It was the deadliest attack on Jews on American soil. Reeling from the pain, Pittsburghers struggled to make sense of the tragedy that had befallen their city, and people around the world responded with an outpouring of love, support, mitzvahs and faith.