

# VAYEIRA



## ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY



**Rabbi Reuven  
Tradburks**  
Director of RCA  
Israel Region

The beloved stories of the life of Avraham are found in our Parsha. Avraham hosts the angels who have come to tell him of the birth of Sarah. G-d tells Avraham of the impending destruction of Sodom; Avraham pleads on their behalf. The City of Sodom is destroyed, Lot is saved. The nations of Moav and Amon are born from Lot and his daughters. Avraham sojourns in Gerar. Sarah gives birth to Yitzchak, Hagar and Yishmael are sent away. Avraham makes a pact with Avimelech. The Parsha concludes with the dramatic story of Akeidat Yitzchak, the near death of Yitzchak at the hands of Avraham.

**1<sup>st</sup> Aliya (18:1-14).** G-d appears to Avraham.



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3 men are warmly welcomed by Avraham with lavish hospitality. They announce to him that by this time next year Sarah will have a child. She overhears this from the tent and laughs, for her ability to bear a child is a thing of the past. G-d protests – is anything too much for G-d – this time next year you will have had a child.

This story is a precious glimpse into the home of Avraham and Sarah. Running to do kindness. And the whole house is into it – Avraham, Sarah, the young helpers. The hospitality, concern for others and open home modeled by Avraham becomes the paradigm of chesed for the Jewish people.

Sarah laughs at the news that she will have a child. She is reprimanded for that. But Avraham laughed at the same news at the end of last week's parsha. He is not reprimanded. Rashi comments there: laughter comes in 2 forms. Simcha, happy laughter. And scoffing. Avraham laughed; wow, look at that, me 99, she 90 – and we'll have a child! Sarah scoffed, guffawed: what? Me at 90 and he at 99? Don't think so.

She has a point. Sarah is the realist. Avraham the dreamer. Jewish history will need the dreamers and the realists. The Avot tend to be the dreamers; the Imahot, the women, the realists.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Aliya (18:15-33).** The men leave for Sodom. G-d convinces Himself that He may not withhold from Avraham, the champion of justice, of His plan to destroy Sodom. Avraham challenges Him: How can You destroy the righteous along with the wicked? And how can You destroy the place if there are righteous people present?

Avraham presses his point.

Something has changed in the life of Avraham. When we first met him, he was promised fame and fortune and family. And the land of Israel. He received fortune in Egypt, fame in the war of the 5 kings and the 4 kings. Those were personal promises to him – he would have fame and he would have fortune.

The other 2 promises have not yet happened – family and the land of Israel. Those are not personal promises. Those are historic – the Jewish people will be born from you and the Jewish people will inherit this land of Israel. He has been promised family – for 25 years. And repeatedly promised the land of Israel. However, all the promises were in one direction – G-d promising to Avraham. Only with Milah was a demand made of Avraham. And no longer an amorphous promise of a child, but an imminent one – in less than a year.

Avraham senses that he is transitioning from recipient to teacher. He needs to be the teacher of G-d's ways to the next generation, and all subsequent. He teaches kindness by example. And he needs to teach justice – not just human justice, but Divine as well. The covenant with G-d of mila is an invitation by G-d to engage. And engage Avraham does.

זכור אל תשכח

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**3<sup>rd</sup> Aliya (10:1-20).** The men journey to Sodom. Lot prevails on them to stay with him. The men of the city object to the presence of these foreigners. It turns violent. The visitors tell Lot that Sodom is to be destroyed and he must leave quickly. His sons in law refuse. The morning dawns and Lot, his wife and daughters leave Sodom, told not to look back.

Lot is Avraham's closest relative. He seems to follow in the footsteps of Avraham. He welcomes the strangers, gives them a place in his home, serves them food. A parallel story to Avraham's kindness to them. But, the lesson lies not in the similarities but in the differences. Lot is living in Sodom. That makes all the difference.

This story is the beginning of the theme that will dominate the rest of the book of Genesis: who of Avraham's family is in? And who is out? Avraham's family will inherit the covenant of the Jewish people – but who in his family? With the imminent birth of Yitzchak, the question as to who will inherit the land of Israel becomes urgent. Will it be all of Avraham's entourage? Lot, Yishmael, Yitzchak? Will Avraham's generosity of spirit extend to the promise of the Land – will he want to include his

broader family unit?

Well, one person we can see is not going to be a part of Jewish history: Lot. Lot writes himself out of that possibility with his association with Sodom.

**4<sup>th</sup> Aliya (19:21-21:4).** Lot is told to flee Sodom. The cities of Sodom and Gemora (Amora in Hebrew) are destroyed. Lot's wife looks back and turns to a pillar of salt. Avraham looks out from the hills and sees the destruction. Lot flees to the hills. The 2 daughters of Lot play him with wine and become pregnant from him, reasoning that they are the only ones left in the world. They name their children Moav and Amon. Avraham goes to Gerar, Avimelech is told by G-d not to touch Sarah, Avimelech confronts Avraham as to why he hid Sarah's identity from him. Avraham responds: I saw there is no fear of G-d here. G-d fulfills what he promised to Sarah. She gives birth to Yitzchak. Avraham circumcises him as G-d commanded.

There is a lot of "seeing": Lot should not look back, while Avraham is looking over the plain. The daughters see themselves as Noah and family – the sole survivors. Avraham sees there is no fear of G-d.

Lot did not see, or take to heart that he lived amongst sinners. What Lot did not see around him, Avraham perceived immediately in Gerar; there is no fear of G-d here.

The story with Lot's daughters is a bitter irony – as Rav Hershel Schachter likes to point out – did they really think, of all the people in the world, they are the most righteous to be saved? There is no one else

May the Torah learned from this issue of TT  
be in loving memory of and לעיני

**SHARON (RUBIN) PREISER ע"ה**

On her fifth yearzeit

ט"ז מרחשון

*Parents: Blossom and Israel Rubin*

*Sister: Eileen Polly*

*Husband: Uriel Preiser*

*Children and Grandchildren*

in the entire world except them? Really? What about Avraham? How did they feel the next day when they walked down the street and saw a whole world of people?

**5<sup>th</sup> Aliya (21:5-21).** Yitzchak grows and is weaned. Sarah sees Yishmael playing with Yitzchak. She tells Avraham to banish this boy, for he will not inherit on a par with Yitzchak. This troubles Avraham but G-d tells him to listen to Sarah. Avraham arises early, sends away Hagar and Yishmael. They go to the desert of Beersheva. The water runs out. Hagar cannot bear to see the death of her child and cries. An angel calls to her. Her eyes are opened, she sees a well and gives water to Yishmael.

The next generation of the Jewish people has now been born. Who will be part of the covenant? Lot is out, but he is not a child of Avraham, albeit a nephew. Sarah tells Avraham that Yishmael, although a child of Avraham is not the next generation of the Jewish people. Yishmael's banishment is a parallel story to the Akeida that we are about to read. In both stories Avraham arises early, a child walks with a parent, the child's life is in danger, an angel calls, the parent sees what they did not see before, the child is saved. Similar stories teach that G-d cares and saves the one in distress. But similarities are only similar – they are not the same. Yishmael will not be Yitzchak's equal in the next generation of the Jewish people.

Dedicated L'iluy Nishmat  
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**Helen Schiffmiller a"h**  
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**6<sup>th</sup> Aliya (21:22-34).** Avimelech initiates a pact with Avraham in Beersheva. They name the place Beersheva from the word to swear. Avraham calls out in G-d's name in Beersheva.

Avraham's fame has prompted a pact. But the lesson lies in what is missing. While Avraham is now famous, he holds only great moral suasion; but no political standing. He has no land, no army, no political presence. The promise that he will possess this land remains but a dream.

**7<sup>th</sup> Aliya (22:1-24).** Akeidat Yitzchak, the binding of Isaac. Avraham is told to take Yitzchak and offer him as an offering. On the way, Yitzchak questions Avraham. They arrive at the mountain. At the last moment, the angel calls to Avraham. Avraham has proven his loyalty to G-d's command. He sees a ram caught in the bush and offers it in the place of Yitzchak. They return to Beersheva.

The most dramatic story in the Torah. A story of absolute loyalty to the Divine command but also one of pathos and irony. The man of generosity, who pleaded for the lives of the wicked of Sodom now

prepared to take the life of his son. The one who challenged the injustice of the impending destruction of Sodom, now has no voice. And the most obvious – the one who waited patiently for 25 years for the promise of a child – and a future – now prepared to destroy it all.

A story that can be thought about and studied for a lifetime. Perhaps, one element of the story pertains to the promises. While the promise to Avraham of fame, family and fortune have been granted by G-d. And the promise of his family inheriting the Land of Israel is now able to take shape. Do not think G-d's reach for man and for the Jewish people will be without its complexity, its sacrifices, its mysteries in trying to understand the ineffable ways of G-d. While an intimate bond is being created of G-d's love for the Jewish people, and while we are increasingly being drawn to Him, He remains opaque, inscrutable, mysterious, beyond our grasp. ■



## STATS

4th of the 54 sedras; 4th of 12 sedras in B'reishit  
Written on 252 lines in a Torah, rank: 5 6 Parshiyot; 4 open, 2 closed

147 p'sukim - ranks 7th (4th in B'reishit) 2085 words - ranks 2nd (1st in B'reishit) 7862 letters - rank: 3rd (2nd in B'reishit)

Vayeira is actually the 2nd largest sedra in the Torah. (Naso, is #1 with no rival - Bamidbar, Pinchas, and R'ei all take up more lines than Vayeira, but those sedras each have many parshiyot, which means a lot of blank space between parshiyot, which adds to the line-count.)



## MITZVOT

None of Taryag (the 613 mitzvot) are found in Vayeira (one of 17 sedras without entries on the list of 613) - however, there are Midot and values and other lessons.

**With great sadness we announce  
the passing בשיבה טובה  
of our dear mother**

**Ruth Sudwarts (Ramm) a"h**

**Who will be greatly missed  
by her children**

*Louis, Pnina and Debby and her  
grandchildren and great grandchildren*

**יהיה זכרה ברוך**



## HAFTORAH

### 2 KINGS, 4:1-37

This week's parsha famously tells us that although Avraham and Sarah were advanced in age they miraculously bear a child. Along these same lines the *haftorah* this Shabbat describes a similar incident in which the navi Elisha assures an elderly childless woman that she will bear a child.

There are a number of miracles that are performed by the navi Elisha. The first miracle is regarding a widow who is impoverished and has been threatened by her creditors that her two sons will be taken as slaves. Elisha tells her to gather empty containers and then pour oil into the empty containers. She did so and a miracle occurs. The oil continued to flow until the last empty jug was filled. The woman was able to sell the oil and was able to repay her debts.

There second miracle is even more significant. Elisha would often pass through the city of Shunem. A couple who lived in the town offered a place for Elisha to stay. They even made a guest room that Elisha could use whenever he needed. Elisha became aware that the couple was childless. He blessed the woman that she would give birth. Indeed a year later a son was born to the couple.

The story does not end there. A few years later the son died suddenly. The woman called Elisha back to her home. Elisha quickly came and miraculously was able to bring the child back to life. ■

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