



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

Defending, Not Vilifying

Avraham was the first to uncover the presence of the One God who governs all existence. His life radiated kedusha and compassion, weaving together devotion to Hashem with tender care for His creations.

When Hashem summoned him to abandon his homeland and journey to an unknown land, he did not hesitate or question. Later, when the King of Sedom offered him gold and treasures after he rescued the downtrodden kings, Avraham refused. He would not enrich himself through immoral wealth. Even at ninety-nine, he embraced the covenant of circumcision, enduring physical pain with quiet resolve and absolute faith. Every choice he made reflected his unwavering loyalty to Hashem.

Avraham's devotion to Hashem was

matched by his devotion to humanity. He rescued his nephew Lot, who had abandoned him in pursuit of greener pastures in the corrupt city of Sedom. He intervened in a brutal, decades-long war, halting bloodshed and restoring justice. Even in his own pain, just days after circumcision, he welcomed weary travelers into his tent beneath the searing desert sun. His faith was not confined to thought or ritual — it took form in kindness and generosity.

DEFENDING THE FALLEN

Among all his achievements, one of Avraham's finest moments was his response to sinners. Noah had spent 120 years building the Teivah, giving time to daven for others and perhaps inspire change. Yet he prayed for no one and brought no one closer to Hashem. When the rain fell, he quietly entered the ark with his family, showing little anguish for a world drowning outside.

Avraham was different. When told of the impending destruction of Sedom, he rose to pray for its people. He pleaded persistently, hoping that even a handful of tzadikim or righteous individuals might spare the entire city. His concern for others ran so deep that he dared to voice what could have sounded heretical from anyone else:

הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט?

"Shall the Judge of all the earth not act justly?"

He began with humility, acknowledging his own smallness — afar va'eifer, mere dust and ashes — yet he spoke boldly, demanding

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justice and mercy from Hashem Himself. This was one of Avraham's greatest moments: his faith expressed not through withdrawal from the world, but through a profound sense of responsibility for others.

To pray for others, you must first identify with them. If you cannot share their pain — or believe in their potential future — your prayers are little more than empty words. This is why Noach could not pray for his generation. His spiritual standing was uncertain, and he feared that too much empathy for sinners might weaken his own commitment. Avraham, by contrast, possessed a deep inner confidence in his faith. He was secure enough to care for others, to pray for them, and to advocate for them even when they had lost their way.

MOSHE'S DOUBLE STAND

Avraham's compassion for sinners became a model for the greatest Jewish leader, Moshe Rabbeinu. Interestingly, Moshe did not grasp this immediately. When he first encountered Hashem at the burning bush, he questioned whether the Jewish people would believe in him or the message he was sent to deliver:

“והן לא יאמינו לי” — “They will not believe me.”

His doubts were understandable. After centuries of crushing slavery, the nation was broken and demoralized. They had drifted toward paganism and despair. Moshe justifiably wondered why Hashem would redeem such a people, or whether they were even capable of redemption.

Yet this is not the kind of leader Hashem desired. Hashem does not seek those who judge or condemn sinners, but those who defend them and continue to believe in their capacity to rise again. For this reason,

Moshe was momentarily struck with tzara'at — a divine rebuke for criticizing his people instead of standing up for them. From Avraham he would learn that true leadership is not built on judgment, but on empathy and faith in the goodness that still flickers within others.

Ultimately, Moshe internalized Avraham's lesson. Twice he stood in defense of his nation against annihilation. After the sin of the egel, he prayed for forgiveness for forty days — twice — pleading on behalf of the people. His appeal reached its height when he declared: “If You will not forgive Your people, erase me from Your book.”

A year later, after the sin of the meraglim, Moshe once again rose to protect the Jewish people from destruction. From his ancestor Avraham, he learned that Hashem does not desire leaders who condemn His nation as sinners, but those who intercede for them, who see their brokenness yet continue to believe in their potential.

THE PRICE OF CONDEMNING ISRAEL

Centuries later, another navi faced the same lesson. Eliyahu triumphantly proved Hashem's dominion against the prophets of Ba'al on Har HaCarmel, yet he was exasperated. Fire descended from heaven to consume his offering, while the sacrifices of the pagan priests were ignored. Still, the people remained unmoved, clinging to idolatry. In despair, Eliyahu cried out to Hashem:

וַיֹּאמֶר קִנְיָה קִנְיָה לְה' אֱלֹקֵי צָבָא-וְתִי כִּי־עֲזָבוּ
בְּרִיתְךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִזְבְּחוֹתֶיךָ הָרָסוּ וְאֶת־נְבִיאֶיךָ
הָרְגוּ בַּחֶרֶב וְאֶתְּרָא אֲנִי לְבַדִּי וַיְבַקְשׁוּ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי לְקַחְתָּהּ
(מלכים א' י"ז)

Instead of defending his people, Eliyahu accused them. In response, Hashem called him to ascend the mountain — and there,

amid the stillness, commanded him to appoint Elisha as his successor. Soon after, Eliyahu would be carried heavenward in a fiery chariot. His spiritual greatness was undeniable, but once he turned from defender to prosecutor, his mission had reached its end.

Hashem does not desire those who condemn His people but those who stand beside them — who, like Avraham and Moshe, defend them even in failure. Avraham set the standard; Moshe embodied it; Eliyahu, for all his brilliance, could not fully grasp it.

GIDON'S LOYALTY

The ability to defend our people is so central to leadership that it can justify divine selection, even when other spiritual traits are lacking. Gidon was not a man of exceptional spiritual stature. Yet Hashem chose him to lead the nation against Midyan precisely because he defended the Jewish people.

When the angel of Hashem appeared to Gidon as he worked in his father's fields, Gidon questioned how Hashem could allow His chosen nation to suffer such hardship. How could Hashem have abandoned His people so quickly? He knew their sins and failures, yet he still believed they remained worthy of divine love and compassion.

His loyalty drew a divine response:
וַיִּפֶּן אֱלֹהֵי ה' וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בְּכַחַךְ זֶה וְהוֹשַׁעְתָּ אֶת־
יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכַּף מִדְיָן הֲלֹא שְׁלַחְתִּיךְ?

"Hashem turned to him and said: Go with this strength of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midyan — have I not sent you?" (Shoftim 6:14)

Chazal explain that this "strength" refers

to his defense of Israel. Because Gidon spoke favorably of the Jewish people, the angel revealed himself and appointed him as savior:

שלמד עליהם זכות - מיד נגלה עליו המלאך,
שנאמר 'לך בכחך זה'

"He defended Israel, and immediately the angel appeared to him, as it is written: 'Go with this strength of yours'" (Midrash Tanchuma, Shoftim 4).

In that moment, Gidon taught a timeless truth: Hashem seeks leaders who see beyond sin and failure — who can still believe in the worth of their people and speak in their defense.

Moshe twice rose to defend a nation that had betrayed Hashem yet refused to abandon them. Gidon, too, believed with conviction that the Jewish people did not deserve the suffering they endured. Because of that belief, he was charged to act with confidence, assured that Hashem's blessing and guidance would accompany him.

Even Eliyahu, for all his greatness, could not fully grasp this love for the Jewish people. His frustration led him to rebuke rather than defend, and his mantle was passed to another.

Leadership in Hashem's eyes is not measured only by faith or prophecy, but by the capacity to love, to defend, and to believe in the enduring worth of His people.

RECKLESS WORDS, NOT OUR MASORAH

Our nation is deeply divided over how to balance Torah study with public service. This is not merely a practical disagreement but a profound question about how we understand Talmud Torah and its relationship to our love and responsibility for the Jewish people.

Many who read these words likely share my conviction that the ideal form of divine

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service combines deep Torah study with active defense of our people and homeland. Others believe Torah study — and the lifestyle that sustains it — must be preserved even at the cost of refraining from the mitzvah of militarily defending our Land.

Amid this debate, many have made deeply troubling statements. They disregard the suffering our people have endured, and their words are hurtful and divisive.

Even more seriously, these statements betray the legacy of our Masorah. To label other Jews — religious or not — as sinners, heretics, or evildoers is a tragic distortion of the lessons taught by our greatest leaders. To vilify those who defended our people and sacrificed for the fulfillment of Hashem's nevuot is an even graver distortion.

Avraham prayed for the residents of Sedom, a society steeped in cruelty and moral decay. Moshe pleaded for forgiveness on behalf of a nation that had worshipped the golden calf. Gidon defended a generation that had repeatedly abandoned Hashem.

We are privileged to live among one of the noblest generations in Jewish history — a people who have waged a long and painful war with courage, unity, and faith. Our nation has risen in devotion to protect life and sanctify

Hashem's name. To dismiss them as sinners is not only intellectually dishonest; it is an inexcusable betrayal of our Masorah and the values that have always defined Jewish leadership. It is not the way of Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabeinu.

The current debate is difficult, but it reflects a deep yearning by both sides to serve Hashem in the fullest way possible. As we discuss and disagree, we must speak with care and reverence — words shaped by love rather than judgment. Every Jew who seeks to live faithfully, and especially those who have sacrificed comfort, safety, or even life itself for the future of our people, deserves to be spoken of with admiration and gratitude.

Harsh words close hearts, but words of respect can elevate even disagreement into a form of avodat Hashem. We must speak with generosity of spirit — seeing the dignity and virtue in every Jew. This is the path that has always guided Am Yisrael — and it is what keeps our nation not only strong, but kind. ■



OU Press is honored to partner with Rabbi Moshe Taragin on his new volume in Hebrew regarding the recent war ('Emunah B'toch Hahastara). This remarkable book is also available in English, **"Dark Clouds Above, Faith Below"**



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