



ALIYA BY ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA Israel Region

PARSHAT VAYEIRA

Our parsha is the heart of the beloved stories of Avraham.

There are two parallel themes in the parsha: 1) Avraham as the exemplar of monotheism and generosity and 2) who will be the next generation to carry on this legacy.

The Torah will describe Avraham as a kind and generous soul, while at the same time a man of faith, of interaction with G-d and with His Name on his lips. Avraham teaches by example.

The second theme of the Jewish future is punctuated by the birth of Yitzchak and the banishment of Yishmael.

These two themes, Avraham the kind, and Yitzchak as the next generation clash in the great drama of the Akeida.



1ST ALIYA (18:1-14)

G-d appears to Avraham. 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 – by this time next year you will have a child.

This story of the generosity of Avraham and Sarah is beloved, and for good reason. Avraham offers strangers water and bread. Running and involving the whole family in their generosity, they lavish these strangers with a feast of fresh bread and meat.

The original offer to them was water to wash their feet. Rashi comments that Avraham offered this so they would wash the dust of idol worship off of their feet.

This comment is to enhance Avraham's generosity. To whom is Avraham lavishing generosity? Not only are these strangers, they are idol worshippers to boot.

What a paradigm of kindness, generosity and hospitality; generosity, lavish generosity to complete idol worshipping strangers.

These men, it turns out, are angels, to tell Avraham and Sarah of their impending child. This is a faint echo of Breishit. G-d Creates by saying. Let there be light. And there was light. Sarah could have had her child without being told she was going to have the child.

Perhaps telling her was a hint to Creation, as if to say, this is the way I Create; I say and then it happens. I, G-d, am saying to you and then it will happen. Just so you

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know, it is I Who is behind this.



2ND ALIYA (18:15-33)

The men leave for Sodom. G-d reasons 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.

Avraham's generosity is on display again. Avraham argues with G-d Himself to save Sodom. That is indeed generous and caring, besides being rather audacious.

But we must pay attention to not only what Avraham is doing but who he is doing it for. From the first mention of Sodom, when Lot chose to live in that region we were told about Sodom: the people are exceedingly wicked. That is how they are described.

Avraham is lobbying on behalf of wicked people. He himself knows they are wicked because he bargains all the way down to 10 righteous people. Because he himself knows there aren't 50 righteous. Or 40, or 20.

Avraham is pleading for a city of wicked people. That is his generosity, his kindness, his care and concern for others. Pleading with G-d for them.

Avraham is setting a pretty high standard of generosity of spirit and concern for others. Generosity is proffered regardless of to whom.



3RD 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 tarry but eventually, relent and leave Sodom, told not to look back.

While Lot is told that the city is to be destroyed, he is told that he can save himself by leaving immediately. He tells his sons in law that they must leave for G-d is to destroy the city. And he was like a joke, "mitzachek" in their eyes.

We have heard the word laugh already in the parsha. Sarah laughed at the word that G-d would give her a child. The sons-in-law of Lot laugh when told that G-d would destroy the city.

One is a laugh at good news, one a laugh at bad news.

The laugh of Sarah is an incredulous laugh, like "I can't believe this is happening to me; I am living a dream."

The laugh of the sons-in-law of Lot is a scoffing laugh. A laugh of denial. The city is not going to be destroyed. Leave us alone.

And in another parallel, Lot gets up in the morning and dallies. We highlight the word "vayitmama" with the musical note shalsholet, that is a dramatically lingering note.

When faced with destruction, Lot dallies. Or better, when faced with the possibility of saving his life and his family, he dallies.

This story can be seen as a foil, a contrast to the upcoming story of the Akeida. In both, a Divine command is given. Lot, say the angels, leave this city immediately. Avraham, take your son as a sacrifice.

The contrast is the response. Lot tarries, hesitates at the Divine Command. Avraham arises early in the morning at the Divine Command.

And the bitter irony. Lot was commanded to save himself and his family; go quickly before the city is destroyed and you and your family will survive. And he hesitated.

Avraham was told the opposite, the horrible opposite: sacrifice your son, destroy your family. And he jumped to obey the Divine Command.



4TH ALIYA (19:21-21:4)

Lot is told to flee Sodom. The cities of Sodom and Gemora 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 ply 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.

When Avraham is confronted, fairly, by Avimelech as to why he didn't tell him that Sarah was his wife, Avraham responds that he saw there is no fear of G-d here.

Avraham is advocating the second half of ethical monotheism. We have seen his interpersonal generosity, his ethics. Here, it is his beliefs.

He says to Avimelech: without deference to G-d, man acts capriciously, with self-interest, in an indulgent manner. Who knows

what you would do to her, knowing she is my wife? We Jews, on the other hand, defer to the Divine command, complying with the Divine command.



5TH 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.

Yishmael's banishment is another parallel story, a parallel to the Akeida.

Both stories feature: parent arising early, a journey, a child walking with a parent, the child's life in danger, an angel calls, the parent sees what they did not see before, the child is saved.

The parallel is apparent; but where is the contrast?

Avraham goes to the Akeida by Divine command. Hagar is banished by Sarah. Divine command versus human activity. This contrast informs the contrast of Yishmael and Yitzchak. Yishmael will be a great nation by the criteria of great nations. Yitzchak will be a great nation with a special covenant with the Creator. One will be of this world; one will be of an elevated world.



6TH 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.

Another parallel story; a covenant. Avimelech makes a covenant with Avraham. G-d Made a covenant with Avraham.

The nations work in the rough and tumble of this world. As such, when Avimelech sees Avraham's great success, he figures it is good to be with a winner. Let's make a deal.

The Jewish people march to the covenant with the Creator, a covenant of an entirely different sort.



7TH 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 of objection. 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.

Why would Avraham have challenged the destruction of Sodom but here is so accepting?

Perhaps the difference lies in the Divine command. When G-d tells Avraham He intends to destroy Sodom there is no Divine

command. They are talking. G-d is telling Avraham what He intends to do. Avraham challenges.

Here, at the Akeida, Avraham is commanded. Sacrifice Yitzchak. Not informed. Commanded. I can challenge the Divine intent. I can challenge His balancing of justice and generosity. Perhaps He will balance things differently.

But when He commands, there is but one response. Commands are non negotiable. There is no challenging the command. There is only acquiescence, compliance, deference.

We can challenge what He intends to do; we cannot challenge His Command.

HAFOTRAH: 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.

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. ■