



Emulating Hashem

By Menachem Kunin, 12th Grade

Parshas Vayera begins with Avraham recovering from his bris milah. Avraham is looking out to the desert on a boiling hot day, hoping for guests to appear. Eventually, three idol worshiping merchants arrive, and Avraham runs out and bows to them, insisting they come in for a rest. Avraham tells them that he will give them a little bit of water and bread. Instead, Avraham and Sarah prepare a massive and lavish feast which included 3 different types of meat for the guests to choose from. A very hospitable and kind gesture performed by Avraham.

Meanwhile, in a separate location, a very different event was taking place. In S'dom, the law said that one was not allowed to host guests. Charity was forbidden because the people were afraid that their wealth would deplete. The punishment for violating these laws were severe. When a beggar would wander into S'dom, the people would mark their names on their coins and give him a dinar. However, no one would sell him bread. When he perished of hunger, everyone would come and claim his coin. There was once a young girl who secretly carried bread out to a poor person in the street in her water pitcher. After three days passed and the man didn't die, the young girl was discovered. They covered the girl with honey and put her atop the city walls, leaving her there until bees came and ate her. Not a far distance from Avraham, yet a totally different set of values

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Now I Know That You Are G-d Fearing

By BZ Scheinman, 11th Grade

“VaYomer Al-Tishlach Yadcha El-HaNaar V'Al-Taas Lo Meumah Ki Atah Yadati Ki-Yireh Elokim Ata.” One of the most famous and inspirational stories in the entire Torah occurs in this week's Parsha: the story of Akeidas Yitzchak. We learn in this Parsha that Hashem gave Avraham ten different tests, the last and most difficult of these tests being the Akeida. Hashem commands Avraham to take his only child and offer him as a Korban to Hashem. Just as Avraham is about to slaughter his son and complete his final test, an angel calls out to Avraham with a message from Hashem, saying that he should not go through with the Schechting of Yitzchak. Hashem explains to Avraham: “Atah Yadati,” now I, Hashem, know that you, Avraham, are a truly God-fearing person.

The Vilna Gaon asks an interesting question on these words. What is the meaning of the words “Atah Yadati,” - now I know? Did Hashem only realize that Avraham was a Tzadik after the Akeida? Avraham had already passed all nine of the tests he had taken, plus there had been countless stories which expressed his righteousness! How could it be that only now, after his tenth test, did Hashem recognize that Avraham was a Tzadik?

The Vilna Gaon gives a fascinating answer: A person's greatness cannot truly be recognized until they have

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Torah Teasers

By Rabbi Moshe Erlbaum, 9th Grade Rebbe

Parshat Vayeira Questions

1. Aside from the book of Genesis, where else do the cities of Sodom and Amora appear in the Torah?
2. Where is salt mentioned in this parsha? When is the next time that salt is mentioned in the Torah?
3. In this parsha, which two people make a Mishteh - "a feast"?
4. Where is butter mentioned in this parsha? In what context is butter mentioned in the Prophets?
5. In this parsha, which two people question Hashem about killing a *tzaddik* (righteous person)?
6. Which two people give the same exact gifts to each other?
7. In this parsha, who became intoxicated with wine? What other two people in the book of Genesis became drunk?

Answers

1. The song in Parshat Ha'azinu mentions Sodom and Amora (Deut. 32:32).
2. Lot's wife turns around and becomes "a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26). Salt is not mentioned again until Leviticus 2:13 with regard to the salt required for *korbonot*.
3. Lot makes a feast for the angels (Genesis 19:3), and Avraham makes a feast when Yitzhak is weaned (21:8).
4. Avraham serves butter to the angels (Genesis 18:8). In the book of Judges, Yael serves butter to Sisra (Shoftim 5:25).
5. Avraham asks Hashem if He will kill the *tzaddikim* of Sodom (Genesis 18:25). Avimelech also asks Hashem if He will kill a *tzaddik* (referring to himself for not touching Sarah) (Genesis 20:4).
6. When Avimelech returns Sarah, he gives to Avraham sheep and cattle (Genesis 20:14). Later in the parsha when the two make a treaty, Avraham gives Avimelech the same gift of sheep and cattle (Genesis 21:27).
7. Lot became drunk after the destruction of Sodom and Amora (Genesis 19:33). Also, Noach became drunk after the Flood (Genesis 9:21), and the brothers became drunk after bringing Benjamin to see Yosef (Genesis 43:34).



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First Aliyah: Hashem visits Avraham who is sitting by the entrance of his tent in extreme heat. Avraham suddenly noticed three travelers passing by, and ran to invite them into his home. The travelers were really disguised angels, but Avraham did not know this. Avraham and Sarah prepared a meal for them, after which, the angels informed Avraham that Sarah would give birth to a child exactly one year later. Sarah overheard this and laughed since such an occurrence at her age is unnatural. Hashem is displeased with Sarah's lack of faith.

Second Aliyah: Avraham escorts the angels. The angels go to Sodom to destroy the city and the surrounding cities. They also go to rescue Lot and his family, who resided there. Hashem informed Avraham of His intention to destroy Sodom and Avraham attempted to save the region, asking that it be spared if it contains fifty righteous people. After Hashem does not agree to this, Avraham "bargains" with God all the way until Avraham eventually asks Hashem to save Sodom even for only ten righteous people there, but even ten were not to be found.

Third Aliyah: When the angels arrive in Sodom, Lot invites them to his home to eat and rest. Word of Lot's guests spread throughout the city, causing the residents of Sodom to surround Lot's house to attack Lot's guests. Lot refused the demands that he surrender his guests and the angels strike all those surrounding the house with blindness. The angels informed Lot of their mission, and encouraged him to flee. Lot, his wife, and two of his daughters were escorted out of the city to safety, and were warned not to look back as the city was being destroyed.

Fourth Aliyah: Hashem destroys the entire Sodom region. Lot's wife looked back, and was transformed into a pillar of salt. Lot and his daughters took shelter in a cave. Assuming that the entire world was destroyed, Lot's daughters intoxicated their father with wine, and seduced him in order to repopulate the world. They each gave birth to a son, the antecedents of the Ammonite and Moabite nations. Avraham relocated to Gerar, where Avimelech, the king of the Pelishtim, takes Sarah, who pretended she was Avraham's sister. Hashem afflicted the members of Avimelech's palace with a disease, and appeared to Avimelech in a dream warning him to return Sarah to her husband, Avraham. Avimelech obeyed, and also showered Avraham and Sarah with gifts, and he and his household were healed. Sarah conceived, and at the age of ninety gave birth to

10-Minute Halacha Shiur

Given by Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz
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Transcribed by
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Tefillin At A Bris Milah Part II

(We left off last week with two opinions as to why our minhag is to wear tefillin at a bris.) The first opinion was that since the pasuk says “al pi shnayim eidim yakum davar,” “on the word of two eidim a matter will be upheld”, therefore we always try to have two osos which can serve as witnesses. The second opinion was that since the passuk says “la’yehudim haysa orah v’simcha v’sasson v’yikar” and sasson is equated to bris and yikar is equated to tefillin, we make sure to pair together tefillin and bris. What would be a nafkah minah between these two opinions?

Perhaps one nafkah minah would be if a person does not have a bris milah. For example, if someone has two brothers who died because of their bris then the halacha is that we don't give the 3rd brother a bris milah. In this case should the person wear tefillin on shabbos to make up for the lack of an os (ie; bris) or not?

- The Terumas Ha’deshen writes that this is a silly question. The idea of having two osos on shabbos is only an aggadata gemara, which is not meant to be interpreted as halacha.
- Another nafka minah would be if one does not have the issur of doing work on shabbos and therefore does not have the os of shabbos. For example, if a person is lost in the desert, the halacha is that he’s allowed to do melacha for seven days, or if someone is critically ill, they are not prohibited from doing melacha. Should a person wear tefillin on shabbos or no? And the common consensus is that one would not wear tefillin in such a case.

There are also those who have the minhag to davka not wear tefillin at a bris milah. This is the shitah of the mekubalim. Additionally the Chid'ah writes in the name of the sefer Yad Ne’eman not to wear tefillin by a bris. The Chid'ah brings a couple of reasons for this. The main reason is that just like on Shabbos we don't wear tefillin because we don't want osos (based on the gemara in arachin) so too by a bris we don't want to have two osos. What this means is that in the eyes of the Chid'ah our question from last week was so strong that there is no answer!

The Tzitz Eliezer however, strongly defends the practice to wear tefillin at a bris. His reason is that even though there are kabbalistic explanations of why we shouldn't wear tefillin at a bris “ain li esek b’nistaros,” “I don't deal with mystical [parts of the Torah],” because we have to go with what is clear halacha.

However to compromise between the two sides our minhag is to not specifically put on tefillin for a bris but not to take them off. This can be especially practical on Rosh Chodesh when we take off our tefillin for mussaf. In order to compromise we don't put them back on after musaf before the bris.

SPARKS OF CHASSIDUS



*With Akiva
Magder*

In this week's parsha, we are exposed more to Lot. There was not much said in the previous parshios about him, but in this week's parsha, we are exposed to him unlike before. The torah tells us of the malachim coming to Lot to save him from the imminent destruction of Sodom. Rashi comments that the only reason Lot was saved was due to the merit of Avraham. The Torah then tells us the way in which Lot reacted: "The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the ground. He said, please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house to spend the night, and bathe your feet; then you may be on your way early." But they said, "No, we will spend the night in the square." (bereishis 19:1-2). The Ohr Hachaim points out that even though the main reason Lot was saved was in the merit of Avraham, the malachim had to give Lot a zchus, merit, in which he would be able to be saved. Meaning that Lot could not have been saved solely with the zchus of Avraham, he needed to do something in order to be saved. In order for Lot to be saved, the malachim "tested" him to see if he would pass and be merited to be saved. Lot was awarded this zchus do to the fact that he greeted the malachim and was hospitable towards them. These seemingly trivial pesukim describing how Lot greeted and served his guests are really very important.

Many times in life one thinks that he can rely on others to save him. Many think that it is up to the big gedolim or full-time Torah learners to save and protect them in this world. However, what we learn from Lot is the opposite. Hashem sends constant tests to someone in order to benefit and enable one to be saved. Many times people are annoyed with the tests they are given by Hashem, but in essence this should not be. Lot's story teaches us that one cannot rely on the zchusim of others to be saved from harm and punishment, rather one needs to create his own zchusim for protection. With this in mind, may we all be able to accept our tests with simchah knowing that in reality they are safeguarding us from harm and reality, bringing us closer to Hashem Yisbarach.

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and beliefs.

After this, Hashem came to Avraham informing him of His plan to destroy S'dom. Avraham responds to Hashem by pleading with Him to not destroy S'dom. The questions is, why would Avraham pray for S'dom? He should be delighted. Hashem confirmed that Avraham's values are correct and S'dom's values are evil. Why was Avraham so upset?

Rabbi Yisroel Cliner answers that the entire world only exists through Hashem's chesed. The mission of mankind is to, the best of one's ability, emulate Hashem. In regard to Hashem we say: "And His compassion extends to all of His creations." This is why Avraham prayed for S'dom. He tried to emulate Hashem's kindness. Whether it be idol worshipping merchants, or an evil and wicked city, Avraham made sure to be kind to everyone, like Hashem is. So too, we should all try to emulate Hashem's chesed by being kind to everyone.



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For God and For Man

Ephraim Herrmann

10th Grade

Some people sit in shul davening, while their thoughts are on their business affairs. This is not the case with Avraham. Right after he got his Brit Milah he was in a lot of pain, and could have easily been distracted and not paying attention to what was going on around him. Avraham was a great tzadik and even though he could have been disturbed by all the distractions, he still managed to think about God. The Gemara tells us that the reason that Avraham was waiting outside his tent was to help people passing by to give them a rest from their travels. Avraham was the epitome of chesed, kindness. He did whatever it took to help people in need. Maybe these two characteristics of Avraham, namely, love of God and kindness, are connected.

The Baal Shem Tov said that in order to love God one has to love other Jews. Someone who cannot concentrate his prayers because he is distracted by his own affairs is not likely to be someone who would go to great lengths to do nice things for other people. The person who can think of God while shopping at the supermarket is someone who loves to help out others. On the other hand, if you are always thinking about yourself, you won't have time to do things for other people since you are too busy with your own needs. Avraham is teaching us that if you love God you will come to help other people.

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served Hashem by displaying the ability and the mental capacity to use two opposite traits in one, single action. To show that one is truly a Yirei Elokim, they must show that they are capable of doing whatever Hashem wants, no matter the nature, behavior, or character trait which comes naturally to him. On the other hand, when one does that which is natural, while it may be considered a good deed, it does not display true greatness. Only when a person goes against their true nature in order to serve God do they truly show that they are a Yirei Elokim.

This is the case with Avraham Avinu. Up until this point, everything that Avraham had done, had been done with kindness and mercy. His first nine tests had all been to serve Hashem through kind actions. However, mercy and kindness were part of Avraham. These tests were not difficult for Avraham because it was easy for Avraham to be nice and do good! These were character traits that Avraham expressed throughout his entire life, whether he was being tested or not!

However, by this tenth test, God tested Avraham's ability to commit a seemingly evil and unkind act in order to serve Hashem, as God now requested him to kill his son. This test forced Avraham to go against his nature to serve Hashem. When Avraham was about to pass this test and show that he could truly serve Hashem in any way possible, not only in ways that were natural to him, only then could Hashem fully recognize what an incredible Tzadik and Yirei Elokim he was. Now that Avraham displayed his service to Hashem through the opposite traits of kindness and of cruelty, "Atah Yadati Ki Yirei Elokim Ata."

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AVRAHAM AND THOSE GUESTS

BAER BOCKO

9TH GRADE

In this week's Parsha, Parshas Vayera, the Pasuk (Perek 18: Pasuk 3) tells us that Avraham said to Hashem: "If I find favor in your eyes, please don't leave your servant." Rashi tells us that Avraham left the shechinah in order to greet his guests. The Gemara in Shabbos (127a) states that Rav pointed to this Pasuk to learn that the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim is greater than greeting the shechinah. The Be'er Yosef asks the following question on this: We know that there is a principle throughout Shas of Ein Maavirin al Hamitzvos, once you are engaged in one mitzvah, do it immediately and do not pass it for another mitzvah. Many poskim hold that this applies even when the first mitzvah is Kalah, a minor mitzvah as compared to the newer mitzvah. Some hold this applies even when the first mitzvah is a Derabanan and the second mitzvah is a Deoraita. Thus, how could it be that Avraham would leave the mitzvah of Kabalas Pnei Hashechina to perform the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim?

The Be'er Yosef brings the Ramban to explain. In the case of Avraham specifically, Kabalas Pnei Hashechina was not categorized as a mitzvah. For Avraham, being in the presence of the shechinah was a reward and pleasure for performing the mitzvah of Bris Milah. In support of this, in Pirkei Avos, Perek Daled, it states that one hour of doing good deeds and mitzvos in this world is more valuable than life in Olam Haba. Thus, Hachnasas Orchim, which is a mitzvah, took precedence over sitting in the presence of the shechinah, which is like being in Olam Haba.

The Be'er Yosef asks a follow up question. Knowing the principle of performing one hour of mitzvos is better than life in Olam Haba, then any mitzvah Avraham would have encountered would have led him to leave the shechinah in order to perform the mitzvah. Why specifically do we learn this concept from the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim?

According to logic and rational thinking, a person engaged in Hachnasas Orchim would not be allowed to leave the shechinah. How could one leave the honor of being with Hashem in order to be with man? Would it not be considered a disrespect to Hashem? The Gemara in Nedarim (32b) states that disrespecting the honor of Hashem is quite severe. The Gemara states that Hashem removed the kahuna from Melchizedek and his descendants and gave it to the descendants of Avraham because Melchizedek inserted Avraham's name in a Bracha before Hashem. Second, the whole foundation of Hachnasas Orchim is to respect man because man is made in the image of Hashem. Thus,

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(Aliyot Summary-Continued from page 2)

a son, who was named Yitzchak. Avraham circumcised Yitzchak when he was eight days old.

Fifth Aliyah: Sarah noticed that Yishmael was a potentially negative influence on Yitzchak, so she demanded that Avraham expel Yishmael and his mother, Hagar. Avraham's initially does not do so, but Hashem tells him to listen to Sarah. Hagar and Yishmael wandered in the desert and eventually ran out of water. Yishmael was about to perish from thirst when an angel "opened Hagar's eyes" and showed her a well of water. Yishmael grew up in the desert and became a skilled archer.

Sixth Aliyah: Avimelech asks Avraham to enter into a treaty with him saying that neither of them will harm the other for three generations. Avraham agreed, but reprimanded Avimelech concerning a well of water which he had dug which was stolen by Avimelech's subjects. Avraham set apart seven ewes, telling Avimelech to take them as a testimony that he, Avraham, dug the well. Avraham planted an orchard and established an inn in Beer Sheva and proclaimed the name of God to all passersby.

Seventh Aliyah: Hashem commands Avraham to take Yitzchak and offer him as a sacrifice on a mountain. Avraham woke up early and saddled his donkey and set out for the mountain with Yitzchak, along with two other men. When they arrived and Avraham and Yitzchak went up the mountain and Avraham built the altar and bound Yitzchak on it. As Avraham stretched out his hand to slaughter his son, an angel ordered him to desist. Avraham instead offered a ram which was caught in a nearby thicket. Hashem promised Avraham great blessings as a reward for passing this difficult test. The Parsha ends by saying that Avraham's sister-in-law had given birth to children, one of whom was Besuel, the father of Yitzchak's future wife, Rivka.

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sent an evil spirit by the name of Ben Temalion to enter the body of the Roman king's daughter. This possession caused the young woman to lose her mind.

She began to howl incessantly, "Send for Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai to heal me!"

When Rabbi Shimon arrived in Rome, the king's messengers immediately ordered him to the palace, where he was ushered into the daughter's sickroom.

Rabbi Shimon stood by her bedside and cried, "Ben Temalion, I command you to leave the king's daughter!"

The spirit listened to Rabbi Shimon and left, and the daughter recovered soon after.

Indebted, the king wanted to reward the venerable rabbi. "Take whatever you desire from my coffers as a reward," he offered.

Rabbi Shimon searched the coffers until he found what he was looking for. In a swift motion, he tore up the decree imperiling the spiritual fate of the Jewish people.

The Baal Shem Tov fell silent and looked up at the duke.

"If you swear no harm shall befall your Jewish residents ever again, your daughter will recover fully from this illness.

Do you agree?"

Nothing mattered to him more than his precious child, so the duke swore upon his and his daughter's very lives. The

Baal Shem Tov leaned close to the girl and whispered, "Just as Rabbi Shimon commanded the spirit to leave the Roman king's daughter, so too I command the spirit to leave the duke's daughter. And the One Who healed the Roman king's daughter, He too shall heal the duke's daughter."

The long silence that followed was interrupted by the Baal Shem Tov instructing the castle staff to remove the restraints. The young woman opened her eyes and sat up, openly wondering why the men were regarding her with concerned looks. To her father's delight, she returned to the daughter she had always been, free from the forces that had gripped her so strongly.

As for the Jews of Pistyn, they marked this miracle on their calendar to celebrate the diversion of a terrible end.

The wealthy merchant couldn't contain his amazement. He managed, however, to flesh it all out in a letter he sent to the philanthropist of Tluste, Reb Ephraim. Their sudden departure had been, as the Baal Shem Tov had predicted, for the need of many.

The next day the pair left Pistyn escorted by a large crowd. When they arrived in Politz, the Baal Shem Tov prayed for the merchant's daughter, and she, like the duke's daughter, recovered completely from her bout of insanity.

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how could you leave the presence of Hashem for man when the actual shechinah of Hashem is right there with you?

Taken together, the Be'er Yosef explains why we learn all of the above by the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim. Although it may have seemed as if Avraham was prioritizing the honor of man over Hashem, in fact, the greatness of performing the mitzvah of Hachnasas Orchim allowed Avraham to leave the presence of Hashem because for him, it was not the mitzvah, but rather reward and pure enjoyment. Rashi brings down that Hashem agreed with Avraham's actions because he waited for Avraham to return. Since Avraham being in the presence of Hashem wasn't in the category of a mitzvah, then the question of Ein Maavirin al Hamitzvos would not apply.

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STORIES OF GREATNESS

TOLD OVER BY: HILLEL GOLUBTCHIK

An unfortunate incident interrupted the fairly predictable lives of a wealthy merchant and his wife: their only daughter was suffering a psychotic episode. Despite the girl's many fine qualities, living around her became insufferable due to her bizarre and unpredictable behavior.

Around this time, the fame of a new miracle worker—the Baal Shem Tov—spread. Aware that his daughter couldn't undertake even a short journey in her condition, the merchant harnessed a fine pair of horses to a carriage and set off alone, hoping to bring the Baal Shem Tov back home to Politz with him.

The Baal Shem Tov was spending several days in Tluste, his childhood home, and the townspeople were thrilled at the opportunity to host such an important guest. They also took advantage of the holy man's presence to request blessings and advice for their sundry woes.

When the merchant arrived in Tluste and requested the Baal Shem Tov return with him to Politz, the townspeople were not pleased. Sympathetic as they were to the man's plea, they were disturbed by the notion of shuttling the Baal Shem Tov away. Did the need of an individual outweigh the needs of an entire community?

But the Baal Shem Tov comforted the townspeople, assuring them that he was, indeed, leaving for the sake of many. Beyond that cryptic statement, he offered no justification for his sudden departure.

As the journey wore on, the pair stopped at an inn in Pistyn. Judging by the miserable faces of the locals, it was clear something was amiss.

The local duke, who habitually tormented the Jews with unfair taxes and harsh decrees, was responsible. It was his daughter, they were told. She had gone insane, and the duke blamed the

Jews and their prayers, threatening to expel them from their homes and confiscate all their possessions if his daughter wasn't healed within three days.

To the merchant, it became clear that their stopover in Pistyn was the unmistakable result of Divine Providence. He informed the elders of Pistyn that the Baal Shem Tov, famous for his miracles, could definitely help. The Baal Shem Tov agreed, and the elders hurried to inform the duke.

But the duke wasn't easily swayed. Why should he trust a man who possessed no medical credentials when he had already approached so many qualified doctors? Besides, the others forbade any administration of medicine in her fragile state. The duke wasn't willing to play games with his daughter's life.

"Tell the duke that I need only to whisper in her ear without any medication or other procedures," said the Baal Shem Tov after hearing of the duke's refusal.

Placated, the duke arranged to meet with the mysterious visitor. Accompanied by the merchant and the elders of Pistyn, the Baal Shem Tov made his way to the estate and requested that the young woman be brought into a room with no crosses and that she be securely tied down.

From under his robe, the Baal Shem Tov produced a volume of Talmud, tractate Me'ilah, and began to read from page 17a about Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:

Once, the king of Rome decreed that Jews were forbidden from observing any of their commandments, such as Shabbat and circumcision. To abolish the decree, the Sages chose Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, known for his reputation as a miracle worker. As Rabbi Shimon began his journey, G-d

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