

THE COMMUNITY PARSHA SHEET



PARSHAT VAYERA

London's Leading Young Professionals Platform and Jewish Communal Centre



RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL
TAL Founder & Director

THANKS TO HASHEM

Thanking G-d at every stage in your life is important.

In the olden days the Mizbeach (altar) represented the place in which a person could offer up thanks to Hashem.

At the end of this week's Parsha, the Torah tells us that Avraham built a Mizbeach upon which to sacrifice his son, Yitzchak. This is the fourth Mizbeach built by Avraham. In Parshat Lech Lecha, he builds one at his first stop in Eretz Yisrael, Shchem, where HaKadosh Baruch Hu informs him that his descendants would inherit the land. He builds a second one between Bet El and Ay. He builds his third Mizbeach in Chevron, after separating from Lot, when Hashem tells him, "Kum hithalech ba'aretz – Go walk in the land...for to you I shall give it" (Bereishit 13:18).

The second Mizbeach, built between Bet El and Ay, is significant in that it is the only Mizbeach to which Avraham Avinu returns. Why is it that he decides to return to this Mizbeach and what is the significance in such a return?

Let us focus on another episode in this week's Parsha that will enhance our understanding of the situation.

The people of Sodom and Gemora were very wicked and Hashem wished to destroy them. First He let Avraham know about this.

Avraham ran to their defence and started to pray vehemently to Hashem to have mercy on the people. He asked that if there were to be found 50 Tsadikim in the place then Hashem should have mercy and not

destroy. Hashem agreed. Avraham saw that there were not 50 Tsadikim but still wished to ask Hashem further. He introduced his next prayer with the famous words "I am but dust and ash".

His prayer was successful and had Hashem found ten (the eventual number that Avraham managed to achieve) Tsadikim then Hashem would not have destroyed the area.

What a powerful prayer, what did Avraham mean by dust and ash?

Earth as a substance has very little significance; it is simply dust of the ground. But if one takes a seed and plants it in the earth, the earth nurtures the seed and enables it to grow into a beautiful plant or a tree. Thus, we might say that earth has little significance in the past, but great potential in the future.

Ashes are the opposite. In the future, they are useless. But if we were to examine the ashes' role in the past, we would likely find that they had at one point served an important function, perhaps warming a house, or perhaps they came from a vessel that had been used for many years and had finally worn down.

Avraham felt that he encompassed the negative qualities of both dust and ashes – he was like dust in the past, and like ashes in the future.

When approaching Hashem with a request, he understood that he was nothing, he deserved nothing, and that whatever the Creator wishes will be.

That is why his prayer was so powerful and effective!

In fact the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabah 9:15) relates that Hashem was so impressed so to speak, that He told Avraham, "Because you said, 'I am but dust and ash,' I promise

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15:56pm

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you that your children will be given two great Mitzvot which are performed with dust and ashes. The ashes of the Parah Adumah (the red heifer, the ashes of which were sprinkled upon one who had become defiled through contact with a corpse), and the dust of the Sotah (the wayward wife, who is brought to the Temple and is given to drink a mixture consisting of water, earth (dust), and the letters of Hashem's name dissolved in the water)."

The Dubno Maggid, explains the above Midrash by means of a parable. Once there was a king who made a very large and exclusive banquet. Only the most important and influential people were invited. One of the invitees was a very special man, a wise and scholarly individual, who was highly distinguished among his peers. As expected, the king had set aside a seat for this special guest at the head table.

This guest, however, was also a very modest and unassuming person. When he arrived, he absolutely refused to be seated anywhere near the head table. Instead, he chose for himself a

simple place towards the back of the banquet hall. The king, seeing what had happened, repeatedly tried to get his distinguished guest to take his place at the head table. But to no avail. He absolutely refused to sit anywhere other than at his humble table in the back.

Then the king had an idea. He made his plan known to the others seated at the head table, and they immediately began implementing it. One by one they left their places at the head table, and found themselves a seat at the same table where the humble but distinguished guest was seated. His table had now become the "head table".

The same was true with Avraham. In his humility, he truly felt himself to be dust (hence its use in the mitzvah of Sotah, which comes to clarify something that has occurred in the past – i.e. whether the wife strayed from her husband or not) and ash (hence its use for the mitzvah of Parah Adumah, whose ashes are used in the future to purify one who has become defiled). "If you insist on being dust and ash," said Hashem, "then I will take dust and ash

and create from them beautiful Mitzvot, which will bring honour to you."

When Avraham returned from his short stay in Egypt, the Pasuk relates (13:2) that he was heavily laden with cattle, silver and gold. He had amassed great wealth. Yet he was afraid that this great wealth would steer him off the path. He was worried that it would affect his character, and people might think that he has now left the path of the righteous in order to follow the path of worldly pursuits. Thus the first thing he did was to go back to the place he had originally offered up an offering between Bet El and Ay, and again make an offering. This symbolised that just as he had gone down to Egypt as a righteous man, so too he had come up righteous and that he still acknowledged everything was from Hashem.

Avraham understood all his life that he was but dust and ashes, any wealth amassed was considered to him to be Kaved – heavy. Of course it was welcome, and he would use it for the best, but that was not the main purpose in life. He constantly held his humility and thus merited such a close relationship with Hashem.



RABBI DAVID BAADANI
Director - TAL Chazanut Program

PARSHAT VAYERA

וירא אליו השם... והוא יושב פתח האוהל כחום היום.

G-d appeared to him ...and he was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.

This phrasing is unusual. Why does the Torah introduce G-d's revelation with such vagueness? Why not state clearly, "G-d appeared to Avraham,"? Why the use of "him" instead of Avraham's name?

Reb Nachum of Chernobyl provides a profound insight. The text's ambiguity, he suggests, is intentional. By saying "him" rather than specifying Avraham, G-d conveys that His revelation is not exclusive to one individual. G-d did not want us to think He reveals Himself only to special individuals like Avraham. Rather, anyone could be "him" or "her" –

G-d's presence is available to each of us. G-d appears to "him", to every one of us, not solely to the Avrahams of the world.

In our own lives, we frequently encounter challenges, moments of inspiration, or inner thoughts, which we might dismiss as merely products of circumstance. We may assume, "If G-d wanted me to know something, He would speak to me directly." Yet, according to Reb Nachum, this is precisely how G-d communicates. The circumstances we face, the thoughts and inspirations we experience – these are all divine sparks, communications from G-d. He would not present us with these experiences if He did not believe we could handle them. Nor would He inspire us if He were not speaking to us in His way.

As we go through life, it is essential to remember that G-d does not communicate solely with the Avrahams of the world. He speaks to all His

children. His messages may not always be in plain words; instead, they may come through our circumstances, our feelings, or the advice of others. Yet, G-d is constantly guiding and speaking to us.

Vayera elav Hashem – "G-d appeared to him." Who is "him"? Every "him" or "her" in the world.

This understanding can transform our perspective. When we recognize that each experience, each challenge, is designed for us, we can understand that nothing happens by chance. G-d would not place us in situations He did not intend for us to navigate. He would not give us challenges we were not meant to face.

Living with this awareness means living in constant connection with the Divine. This was how Avraham lived, and as his descendants, we, too, can strive to live each day with this awareness.



RABBI BENJI STONE, TAL Chavruta Program

לְמַנְיַח אֶל-הַנְּחִילוֹת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד - Chapter 5

TWO FACES OF G-D

Part 1 – Pray Smart

אֲמַרְי הָאֲזִינָה | יְהוָה בִּינָה הִגִּינִי:
Give ear to my speech, Hashem;
consider my utterance.

הַקְשִׁיבָה | לְקוֹל שְׁעֵי מַלְכִי וְאֱלֹהֵי כִי-אֶלְדִּק
אֲתַפְלֵל:

Heed the sound of my cry, my king
and G-d, for I pray to You. (Tehillim
5; 2-3).

This year we have seen so much tragedy and loss of life in our homeland and also around the world. As Jews, we continue to live under threat from our neighbours whether in Israel or abroad. How do we respond to tragic events and the ongoing fear of attack?

Furthermore how can we reconcile such terrible occurrences with our concept of a kind and loving G-d?

King David composed this chapter as a response to those nations who sought to wage war on the Jewish people (Rashi) which makes it particularly relevant to this discussion. He offers two pieces of advice in answer to these questions;

1. An Effective Prayer Strategy

We need to be clever when we pray. This applies at all times and certainly when we are faced with adversity. If we had a rare opportunity to meet a King, who had the power to grant our wishes, would we not carefully structure our requests? How much more so should we prepare our words as we stand before the One who can

literally change the order of nature should He wish to do so.

In particular, King David sets out four guidelines we should follow when we pray (Malbim);

- i. Introduce your prayer in elegant fashion and keep it short ("Give ear to my speech, O G-d").
- ii. Make sure you mean what you say. The words expressed should reflect what is inside your heart ("Consider my utterance").
- iii. Only ask for what is absolutely necessary ("Heed the sound of my cry").
- iv. Rely on Hashem only as the One who can grant your wishes. Do not also place your trust in some other individual who you believe can help you ("my king and G-d for I pray to You").



HALACHOT BY RABBI ELI MANSOUR

The Beracha Over Cereal with Milk, and Yogurt with Fruit

If a person eats cereal with milk, the cereal constitutes the "Ikar" – the primary component of the mixture, whereas the milk is "Tafel" – secondary – as it is added merely to enhance the cereal. Therefore, one recites only one Beracha, over the cereal, and this covers both the cereal and the milk. Even if some milk remains in the bowl after one has eaten all the cereal, and one wishes to drink the milk, he does not recite a Beracha over the milk, since the milk had been covered by the Beracha recited over the cereal.

If one adds fruit to yogurt, which is very common, then in most instances, the fruit would be considered secondary to the yogurt. Normally, one adds just a few pieces of fruit to enhance the yogurt's flavor, such that the yogurt is considered the primary component, and the fruit, the secondary component. As such, one would recite only "She'ha'kol" over the yogurt, and this Beracha would cover both the yogurt and the fruit. However, if somebody puts a large amount of fruit in the yogurt, such that he eats mainly fruit with some yogurt mixed in, then he would recite only a Beracha over the fruit,

and this Beracha would also cover the yogurt.

Summary: One who eats cereal with milk recites only a Beracha over the cereal, and this Beracha covers also the milk. Even if some milk is left over, he does not recite a Beracha over the leftover milk. If one adds some fruit to yogurt, he recites only "She'ha'kol" over the yogurt, and this Beracha covers also the fruit, unless he added so much fruit that he essentially eats fruit with some yogurt added, in which case he recites only a Beracha over the fruit, and this Beracha would also cover the yogurt.



WEEKLY PARSHA OVERVIEW

Parshat Vayera

Three days after performing brit mila on himself, Avraham is visited by Hashem. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. Hashem reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. Hashem agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham "bargains" Hashem down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands

for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon.

Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar's son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but Hashem tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel, and

Hashem promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation.

Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that Hashem is with him. In a tenth and final test of Avraham, Hashem instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, Hashem sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, Hashem promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Torah portion concludes with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

Rabbi Sinclair,
Seasonsofthemoon.com

Q

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the brit mila?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?

A

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of mitzvot.



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