

# תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

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## Parshat Vayera

Candles : 5:23

Shacharit : 9

Sof Kriat Shema: 9:51

Sof Zman Tefilla: 10:43

Shabbat Mincha: 5:05

Shabbat Ends: 6:22

## God's White Lie

By Adena Frazer

After receiving the message that she would give birth to a son, Sarah questioned how this could be given Abraham's advanced age. When God recounted Sarah's

comment to Abraham however, He reported that Sarah questioned if she could bear a son given her own old age (*Breishit* 18:12-13). Why did God change Sarah's remark?

The Talmud explains that God edited Sarah's statement for the sake of peace (*Bava Metzia* 87a). Apparently, He felt that repeating Sarah's original comment would detract from the couple's domestic tranquility. These verses, coupled with the preceding interpretation, are used by the Talmud as biblical support for the paramount importance of peace (*Yevamot* 65b).

Similarly, the Talmud points out that God gives up His own honor in order to bring peace between husband and wife. Part of the procedure of checking a *sotah*, a woman who is accused of adultery, involved writing God's name and then blotting it out with water (*Bamidbar* 5:23). Erasing God's name, which is normally prohibited, was permitted in this case in order to clear the name of the accused woman (*Nedarim* 66b).

This emphasis on the primacy of *shalom bayit*, peace of the home, extends from biblical exegesis to Jewish law. The Talmud states that if a person has to choose between purchasing Shabbat candles or Chanukah candles or between purchasing Shabbat candles or wine for Kiddush, Shabbat candles take precedence because of *shalom bayit* (Shabbat 23b). *Rashi* there explains that Shabbat candles contribute to *shalom bayit* simply because people dislike sitting in the dark. The *Shulchan Aruch* codifies the priority of Shabbat candles as *halacha*, stating that "there is no peace in a house without a candle" (*Orach Chaim* 263:3).

Interestingly, the issue of *shalom bayit* also appears in the Talmud in the realm of good advice. Rav Yehuda states that a person should always make sure that there is grain in his house, because food is generally the cause of household argument (*Baba Metzia* 59a). This observation of human nature is something with which we can easily identify.

Certainly, there are values which sometimes override the principle of *shalom bayit*. This week's *parsha* and the example

(Adena Frazer Continued on page 3)

## Buying Out the Guy Next Door

By Rav Frazer

Sodom gets destroyed in this week's Parsha, a fate that all of us would prefer to avoid. But what type of conduct led to the destruction of Sodom; that is, what conduct should we avoid? The *mishna* (*Avot* 5:10) tells us that one who says "what's mine is mine, and what's yours is yours, this is the average trait, and some say this is the trait of Sodom." Excessive focus on formal ownership, without regard for the needs of others, seems to be at the core of the Sodom culture. The *gemara* defines this trait as blindly enforcing one's rights of ownership, refusing to share with others even when it would cause one no loss. This type of behavior is referred to in many places as "*midat Sedom*", the trait of Sodom.

In certain cases, the courts can force a person who is acting with *midat Sedom* to change his ways. One famous example is the case of *bar metzra*, an adjacent property owner. The *gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 108a and elsewhere) rules that one who wishes to sell land must give the right of first refusal to the owner of any adjacent property, as this neighbor stands to gain special benefit from the opportunity to enlarge his property. Selling the land to any other person (for an identical price) would constitute *midat Sedom*, because it would withhold this unique opportunity from the neighbor, without providing any benefit to the seller. A court can intercede to prevent this type of inconsiderate behavior. Even if the land has been sold, they can invalidate the sale and give the neighbor the opportunity to buy for the same price. This *halacha* is derived from the verse (*Devarim* 6:18), "You shall do that which is straight and good."

(Rav Frazer Continued on page 3)

## M o d a o t

★ Good Job Red-Sox. Or something. Now maybe you can stop being bitter fans, and grow up.

(the preceding opinion is only that of the TE layout staff and not the editorial staff...)

Ben Azai says: Run to a light mitzvah like a weighty one and flee from sin, since a mitzvah causes a mitzvah and a sin causes a sin, and the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah and the reward of a sin is a sin.

בן עזאי אומר: הוי רץ למצוה קלה כחמורה  
ובורה מן העברה, שמצוה גוררת מצוה  
ועברה גוררת עברה, ששכר מצוה מצוה  
ושכר עברה עברה.

## Parsha Summary:

### Living in Israel Aint Easy

By Daniel Glass

Abraham is sitting outside his tent when he sees three travelers coming towards him. He and Sarah rush to provide them with food and lodging. The travelers who are actually fact angels tell them that in a year Sarah will give birth to a son. Because of their advanced ages, Sarah laughs at this prophesy.

God then decides to tell Abraham about his plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham protests saying it would not be fair to destroy the cities if there were fifty righteous people in it. God answered that there aren't fifty such people. Abraham barter God down to sparing the city on account of ten righteous, but there aren't even ten righteous people in the cities. So God sends two angels to Sodom to Lot's house to warn Lot and his family to evacuate. Lot is unable to convince his sons-in-law of the impending danger, but flees with his wife and two unmarried daughters. God destroys the cities with sulfur and fire. The angels had told Lot and his family not to look back, but Lot's wife looks back at the cities and turns into a pillar of salt. Thinking that God had destroyed the entire world and they needed to repopulate it, Lot's daughters get him drunk and conceive from him Moab and Ben-Ammi.

Abraham and Sarah go to Gerar where they once again pretend to be brother and sister. Sarah is abducted by King Abimelech, but God prevents Abimelech from being able to sin and tells him in a dream that Sarah is a married woman. Abimelech returns Sarah, and when Abraham prays for his well being, God heals him,

Sarah then becomes pregnant by Abraham and gives birth to Isaac. Ishmael's behavior was not a good influence on Isaac, so Sarah told Abraham to send him and Hagar away. Abraham didn't want to, but God told him to listen to Sarah. Ishmael and Hagar run out of water in the desert, so God sends an angel to save them and promises Hagar that Ishmael will be the start of a great nation.s

Years later, God tests Abraham by telling him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham and Isaac willingly accede to the diving command. With the knife in Abraham's hand, an angel tells Abraham that he has passed the test, so he offers a ram instead of his son.

*Daniel Glass is a sophomore who cannot think of funny things to write about himself every week.*

## Haftarah Summary:

### Two Stories of Food and Kids

By Rafi Farber

A woman whose husband used to be in the prophet gang with Elisha goes up to him and says, "I'm broke, and my sons will be sold into slavery." Elisha, knowing that Rafi was running out of food metaphors for *haftarah* summaries, says, "OK. Take that jug of oil and pour it into any and every jug you can find." The woman sold the miraculous surplus of oil, paid off her debts, and lived off the rest.

Elisha, runs into another woman from Shunem. We'll call her "The Shunamite Woman." It'll be fun. "The Shunamite Woman" realizes that Elisha is a man of God, and sets up a little bedroom in her attic. He finds out that she's childless and her husband is old, and tells her that this time next year she'll have a child. Compare 18:15 in *Vayera* to 4:16 in Kings II. It's the same verse.

The child suddenly has a headache (v. 19) and dies. "The Shunamite Woman" goes and gets Elisha, who happened to be on Mount Carmel, where Elijah did the whole schpiel with the sacrifice. Anyway, she finds him there, calls him over, and he brings the child back to life with a little rescue breathing and help from God

Wasn't that fun? But what does it mean? Obviously, it parallels the story of the birth of Isaac in general and in detail. In *Vayera*, Abraham gives the three men food, and they tell him he's having a son. In Kings II, "The Shunamite Woman" gives Elisha food and shelter, and he tells her she'll have a son. In *Vayera*, a man of God (Abraham) gave food to angels. In Kings II, a woman gave food to a man of God. In *Vayera*, first God provides riches, then God provides children. So, too, here.

But in Kings, the child dies. In *Vayera*, Isaac almost dies. And why did "The Shunamite Woman" have a right to rely on a miracle? Possibly because she knew the story of Isaac. But, as Dr. Seuss so aptly pointed out in his *Magnum Opus One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*, "Why are they all sad and bad and glad? I do not know. Go ask your dad!"

The lesson we should all take out from here is this: If ever you offer food to either an angel, a prophet, or otherwise a man of God, you'll get what you need. Let's feed our Rabbis, because food is where it's at.

*Running out of food metaphors has made Rafi Farber go slightly insane.*

## Pirkei Avot Commentary

By David Fryman

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that one shouldn't assume he has plenty of time to perform the mitzvah. Nor should he convince himself that failure to perform the mitzvah will not cause harm. The knowledge that you have acted in accordance with the will of God brings you closer to Him. Rabbenu Yonah maintains that one eats the fruits of his mitzvah in this world. Every mitzvah-act habituates you to perform more.

(Rav Frazer Continued from Page 1)

Does this extend to a renter as well? If a landlord wishes to sell a rented apartment, does he need to offer the right of first refusal to the tenant, as this may be of special convenience to him? Or is this rule limited to cases where the *bar metzra* is an owner of adjacent land, and inapplicable to a tenant? The *Rashba* (Responsa, 3:151) claims that it is applicable to a tenant as well. He asserts that “there is no doing of that which is straight and good more than this.” However, the *Beit Yosef* (*Choshen Mishpat* 175, s.v. *Vehinei Nishalti*) cites a number of medieval authorities from whom he infers that renters are not protected by this rule.

Because the law in this case is unclear, the *Beit Yosef* concludes that once the apartment has been sold, the renter does not have adequate proof to extract it from the buyer on the grounds of *midat Sedom*. He applies the principle of “*hamotzi mechavero alav haraya*,” one who wishes to extract payment from his fellow, on him rests the burden of proof. The renter cannot prove that he is entitled to the land, as the law is inconclusive on this matter, and thus he is unable to force the buyer to give him the land. The *Beit Yosef* reiterates this ruling in the *Shulchan Aruch*.

However, the *Beit Yosef's* ruling would seem to apply only to a case where the buyer is not volunteering to comply with the *halacha*. It is only in such a case that the court is called on to compel him, making the question of adequate proof relevant. In a case where all of the involved parties have approached a court of their own volition, asking for Torah guidance about what is the proper course of action, the situation may be entirely different. Here, it might be appropriate for the rabbis to inform the parties that, according to the *Rashba*, the rule of *bar metzra* is applicable, and to advise them to heed this opinion, even though it is not the majority. Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (*Tzitz Eliezer* 12:87) deals with a case of this nature, and in fact rules that although the court cannot enforce compliance in these circumstances, the litigants should be informed of the *Rashba's* opinion and encouraged to comply with it.

This is a small example of how complex monetary *halacha* can be. Yet at the core of all of the explanations and differing opinions is a simple and clear goal: to do that which is straight and good in the eyes of God. We should avoid the Sodom-like behavior that the rabbis repudiated, and look for opportunities to help others whenever we can. We should view all that is ours, our property, our skills, and our time, as entrusted to us for use in the service of others, not for hoarding and selfishness.

*Rav Frazer wants to remind people of this lesson when they are all jumping over each other and pushing to get that last roll at seuda shlishit.*

(Adina Frazer continued from page 1)

of the *sotah* however, demonstrate the extent to which the Creator of the world goes to preserve the peace of human households. This extreme emphasis on *shalom bayit* is mirrored in *halachic* rulings and in Talmudic advice. It certainly gives us cause to think twice before doing something, even when seemingly justified, that will disrupt the peace of our homes.

*Adena Frazer believes that shalom bayit is so important that even a Red-Sox-Yankee couple should act cordially to each other during the playoffs.*

## Sedra-Stats (from OU.org)

4th of the 54 *sedras*; 4th of 12 *sedras* in *B'reishit*  
Written on 252 lines in a *Sefer Torah*, ranks 5th  
6 *Parshiyot*; 4 open, 2 closed (pssppp)  
147 *p'sukim* - ranks 7th (4th in *B'reishit*)  
2085 words - ranks 2nd (first in *B'reishit*)  
7862 letters - ranks 3rd (2nd in *B'reishit*)  
*P'sukim* above average in length (words and letters), explaining its rise in rankings from *p'sukim* to words (and letters). *Vayeira* actually 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 which adds to the number of lines.)

## Mitzvot

None of *Taryag* are counted from *Vayeira*  
MITZVA WATCH: Although none of the 613 *mitzvot* are counted from *Vayeira*, there is a wealth of mitzva-lessons to be found in the *sedra*. We do not learn how to be good Jews only from the 613 *mitzvot*. Hospitality, for example, is usually considered part of the mitzva of *G'milut Chasadim*. But many of the details are derived from the behavior of *Avraham Avinu*.

Similarly, *Bikur Cholim* is part of *G'milut Chasadim* as well as being part of the mitzva to emulate God. The connection is contained in the *Midrashim* on *Vayeira* (and other sources). Some mitzva-counters do count some individual forms of *Chesed* as *mitzvot* among *Taryag*.

## Treating Guests Like Abraham

By Adam Mayer-Deutsch

Every Shabbat when we sit down to eat our meal, we start off by singing *Shalom Alechem*, a song of welcoming angels. We address the angels in the four verses of this song: *Shalom* – a greeting, *Boachem* - bringing in, *Barchuni* – asking blessing, and *Tzetchem* - leaving. Rabbi Yose Bar Yehuda says that two angels escort a man home from *shul* to his home on *erev* Shabbat, one good angel and one bad angel. When they arrive at his house and see burning Shabbat candles, a set table, and a made bed, the good angel says “may it be Your will that it be like this next Shabbat,” and the bad angel is forced to say amen. But if not (if the candles, table and bed are not set) then the bad angel says “may it be Your will that it be like this next Shabbat,” and the good angel is forced to say amen.

There are a couple of problems that people have had with singing *Shalom Alechem*. First, how can you tell an angel to bless you? That is something they do on their own, but you cannot ask it of them. And second, why do you tell the angels to leave?

Perhaps the reason that we sing *Shalom Alechem* is from our *parsha*. *Vayera* starts off with Abraham sitting at the entrance of his tent looking and waiting for visitors and guests. It says “and he [Abraham] raised his eyes and saw, and here were three people standing near him, and he saw, and he ran to greet them from the opening of his tent and bowed to the ground” (18:12) *Shalom Alechem* is a song that teaches us how to fulfill the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim*, the bringing in of guests. Possibly, we sing our song about angels and not regular people because in the archetypical story of welcoming guests, Abraham welcomed angels.

Abraham was not waiting in his tent, willing to host anyone who would come, but he was sitting in his doorway looking for people. He was actively trying to find people to bring into his home. When he does see people, he runs to where they are; he does not wait for them to approach him. This corresponds to the first verse *Shalom*, teaching us to actively look for people to bring in.

Then he invites them to wash up, rest and eat. This is the way of *Boachem*, of inviting your guest to come and partake of what you give him. You open your doors and let him come in.

The next verse in the song is the controversial *Barchuni*. One way to understand this is as follows. The nature of God is to always be giving. When you acknowledge that what you receive is from God, it makes God continue to give. So when you say to an angel or to a guest *Barchuni*, you are not asking them to give yourself a blessing, but you are asking them to make a blessing to God. And because this man is your guest and is making a blessing on your food, you re-

ceive the second hand blessing of continued giving.

“And the men stood up from there and looked in the direction of Sodom, and Abraham walked with them to send them on their way.” (18:16) When it was time for the guests to leave Abraham did not just say goodbye and let them walk away, he walked with them to send them on his way. But he also did not kick them out. When it was time for them to go, when they stood up expressed desire to leave, then Abraham sprung into action and escorted them out. This is what the last verse, *Tzetchem* comes to teach. That is to take care of our guests even once they leave, and make sure they have means to get to their next location before they leave yours.

So when you sing *Shalom Alechem* tonight, or anytime in the future, may it be a reminder to you of the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim*, and that you be able to fulfill this mitzvah the whole way through, from going out and meeting people through escorting them on their way when they are finished.

*Adam Mayer-Deutsch is a sophomore from Connecticut. He sings each verse of Shalom Alechem thrice a week.*

## Vayera: Visiting the Sick

By Jeremy Friedman

“And God appeared unto him [Abraham] in the plains of *Mamre*” (*Braishis* 18:1). *Chazal* explain (*Bava Metzia* 86b) that The Holy One, Blessed Be He visited Abraham in his sickness from his circumcision, which occurred three days prior.

The mitzvah of visiting the sick has not been fulfilled unless one also prays for mercy on the sick person’s behalf. If you are praying in his/her presence you may do so in any language because you are, so to speak, praying before the Divine Presence, who is at the bedside of the sick. If, however you are not praying in his/her presence, you should pray in the Holy Tongue and include him/her among all the sick of Israel. This is because the ministering angels are needed in order to elevate your prayer when you are not in the Divine Presence, and they are not bound to regard all languages. Also, the prayer will be more readily heard because of the collective merit of the many sick ones. You should say to the sick man/woman, “May the Almighty have mercy on you, among all the sick of Israel.” On Shabbos you should say, “This is Shabbos, we are forbidden to wail, healing is soon to come, His mercy is great, rest in peace.”

*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (193:1-4)*

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