

הַיְיִוָּז  
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# פרשת וירא Parshat Vayeira

## אשרינו Ashreinu

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



### SALT PERSPECTIVES

RABBI SANDY SHULKES

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HANNAH MARKOVITCH (24')

PENINA KAHANE (22')

JUDAH BERMAN (21')

AYDEN FRANK (23')

וְהַיְיִוָּז עַל סֹדֶם וְעַל  
עַמֹּרָה גְפֹרִית וְאֵשׁ מֵאֵת  
הַיְיִוָּז מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. וַיִּהְיֶה  
אֶת הָעָרִים הָאֵל וְאֵת  
כָּל הַכֹּכָב וְאֵת כָּל יִשְׁבֵי  
הָעָרִים וְצִמַח הָאֲדָמָה.  
וַתִּבֶּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאֲחֵרָיו  
וַתְּהִי נָצִיב מֶלַח

“Then Hashem rained down sulfur and fire on Sodom and Amorrhah.

It was sent down from the sky by Hashem. He overthrew those cities and all that region, including all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation that grew from the ground. But Lot's wife looked back longingly and was turned into a pillar of salt (Bereishit 19:24-26).

Lot and a good portion of his family just barely made it out alive from Sodom and Amorrhah as the cities are being destroyed. Against the instructions from one of the angels to everyone in Lot's family to not look back at the destruction of Sodom and Amorrhah, Lot's wife, Irit, cannot withstand

taking one more look and, as a consequence, is turned into a pillar of salt.

What a strange consequence for turning around?! I always wondered why the Torah specifically chose salt as the agent of destruction. She could have been swallowed up by the earth like Korach, blown up like a sotah, or melted like the Wicked Witch of the West, so why salt? The biggest question and most important is what type of salt did she turn into? There are dozens of salts, edible and non edible, and the Torah leaves the answer ambiguous and obscure. Let's look together at a couple of midrashim to help us answer these questions.

Rashi, in his commentary on the pasuk, explains her transformation as poetic justice, the Divine Symmetry of “*mid-dah k'neged middah*”:

במלח חטאה ובמלח לקתה. אמר לה תני מעט מלח לאורחים הללו, אמרה לו אף המנהג הרע הזה אתה בא להנהיג במקום הזה

“By salt she sinned, and by salt she was stricken. He (Lot) said to her, ‘Give a little salt to these guests.’ She said to him, ‘Even this evil practice you have come to institute in

this place?”

Lot's wife rejected the social norms that Lot adopted from his Uncle Avraham and maintained her native perspective on kindness. When she turned around to look at the destruction of Sodom and Amorrhah, she was demonstrating that her values and identity lay in that city.

I would like to argue that according to Rashi she turned into table salt. She showed her intolerance to her guests through salt.

The next midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 51:5) gives a different perspective about the role of salt:

“R. Yitzchak said: She sinned with salt. On the very night that the angels had come to Lot, what did she do? She went to all of her neighbors and said to them, ‘Give me some salt because we have guests.’ Her intent was to alert everyone to their presence.”

In this case salt acted as a code word, an agent to inform others of societal rules being broken -- in this case, having guests. I would like to argue that according to Midrash Rabbah she turned into smelling salt, which is used to arouse consciousness.

The last midrash found in Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer gives a different spin to the situation:

“Irit, the wife of Lot, had pity and mercy on her married daughters and she gazed behind to see if they were walking behind her or not and she gazed at the Shechina and became a pillar of salt.”

According to this midrash, out of concern for the safety of her children and pain that she felt for leaving them behind, she turned around. Unlike the other midrashim, this puts a positive twist on Irit, giving us a glimpse of her positive qualities and the care she showed toward her children.

I would like to argue that according to Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer, Lot's wife turned into kosher salt, as she was concerned for her family.

Lot's wife had no right to turn round to see the destruction of her city, and therefore she turned into a pillar of salt. The Ramban gives two explanations why she was killed: either because she looked directly at the Shechina destroying Sodom or she was only saved by the merit of Avraham and had no right to turn around.

It's clear from the midrashim that there is not one right approach when looking at Irit's transformation to salt.

One could argue that the Torah is trying to be ambiguous to teach us a compelling life lesson. Whatever salt comes to us in life, we must remember to be kind and hospitable and not be driven by the ways of Sodom and Amorrhah like Irit.

## POWER OF SILENCE

HANNAH MARKOVITCH (24')

In the opening pesukim to Parshat Vayeira, Hashem visited Avraham:

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵי מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פְּתַח הָאֵהָל כְּחַם הַיּוֹם.  
וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיִּרְץ  
לְקָרְאתָם מִפְּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה

“And Hashem appeared to him [Avraham] in the plains of Mamre and he was sitting at the entrance to the tent in the heat of the day. And he lifted his eyes and he saw three men standing in front of him and he saw them, and he ran to greet them from the entrance to the tent and he bowed to the ground” (Bereishit 18:1-2).

In this week's parsha, Hashem appeared to Avraham in the field of Mamre where he and his entire household were circumcised. The pasuk initially only says that Hashem appeared to Avraham, and the next pasuk then says that three men came to him. Why does the pasuk say that Hashem “appeared” to him, and then all of a sudden say that the men came? There's no mention of why Hashem appeared, what occurred, or the significance of it!

Perhaps Hashem didn't want or need to tell Avraham anything. Perhaps the sole purpose was to be by Avraham's side while he was in pain and healing from his brit milah. The Torah specifically uses the “י-ק-ו” name of Hashem, the name that describes the compassionate, loving, father personality of Hashem instead of Elokim, the more critical or judging personality of Hashem. This seemingly strange “appearance,” without a written purpose, may show that Hashem didn't necessarily need to say anything to Avraham. Hashem appeared to Avraham to keep him company while he was in pain and to be mevaker choleh.

Although this may go unnoticed, this mention of Hashem's appearance teaches us a very valuable life lesson. You don't always have to say something to make someone feel better in their time of need. Sometimes just the fact that you “appear” and are fully present for a friend or a loved one can be all that's needed to make someone feel supported and comforted. We don't always have the right words to say to someone in pain, and Hashem teaches

us that that is ok, and sometimes even the proper way to provide healing. This lesson is based on the concept of *vehalachta b'drachav*—following in Hashem's ways to try to do what He does.

## THE HERE AND NOW

PENINA KAHANE (22')

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayeira, Avraham is visited by the three angels on the third day following his brit milah. Each of the angels had a purpose while visiting: Raphael to heal Avraham, Michael to share the joyous news that Sarah will have a child, and Gavriel to tell Avraham the news that Hashem was going to destroy Sodom. When Gavriel told Avraham that Hashem was going to destroy the city of Sodom, Avraham assumed that Hashem wanted to destroy everything in Sodom. He asked,

הֲאֵף תִּסְפֶּה צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע

“Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty” (Bereishit 18:23)?

Hashem said he would destroy everything in Sodom, so why is Avraham asking this? The Tur HaAroch offers some insight. Avraham is asking—how could Hashem, a God of justice and mercy, kill off the righteous and people who serve Him because of the sins of the wicked? Avraham is implying that doing this will then set a precedent that living a righteous and Torah-driven life will not get one far. Hashem tells Avraham that he is not killing righteous people because there are no righteous people in Sodom.

Later in the parsha, Sarah has the child that God promised her. Yishmael, Avraham's son with Hagar, is not a good influence on Yitzchak, so Sarah asks Avraham to kick them out—which he does. Hagar and Yishmael are left in the desert with no food and water. Hagar breaks down into tears, begging Hashem to give water to her child.

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶת קוֹל הַנְּעָר וַיִּקְרָא מִלֶּאֱ אֱלֹקִים אֶל הָגָר מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מָה לָּךְ הָגָר אֵל תִּירָאִי כִּי שָׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶל קוֹל הַנְּעָר בְּאֶשֶׁר הוּא שָׁם

“God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, ‘What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is’” (Bereishit 21:17).

What does it mean that Hashem heard the cry of the child in his present state? In the Gemara Rosh Hashana, there is a discussion of when people are judged. Rabbeinu Bechaye tells us that from this pasuk, the sages learn

that people are not judged for sins they commit in the future, but only for who they are at that specific moment in time. So when it says “where he is,” Hashem means that even though Yishmael will sin in the future right now he is innocent, so Hashem gives him water based on his present state.

This parsha exemplifies Hashem's attribute of mercy with two lessons: (1) Hashem protects those who live a Torah-driven life, and (2) you are only judged for who you are in the moment, so if you are righteous and will commit a sin in the future when Hashem is judging you, it will not impact the judgment until after you actually sin.

## NO PAIN, NO GAIN

JUDAH BERMAN (21')

Towards the end of this week's parsha, Parshat Vayeira, there is a little story about Avraham sending away his wife Hagar and their son Yishmael. The Torah details how they traveled through the desert until they ran out of sustenance, and then Yishmael began to die. The pasuk says:

וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב לָהּ מִנְגֵד הַרְחֹק כְּמִטְחוּי קֶשֶׁת כִּי אָמְרָה אֵל אֶרְאֶה בְּמוֹת הַיָּלֵד וַתֵּשֶׁב מִנְגֵד וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת קוֹלָהּ וַתִּבְרַךְ. וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶת קוֹל הַנְּעָר וַיִּקְרָא מִלֶּאֱ אֱלֹקִים אֶל הָגָר מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מָה לָּךְ הָגָר אֵל תִּירָאִי כִּי שָׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶל קוֹל הַנְּעָר בְּאֶשֶׁר הוּא שָׁם

“And she went, and sat down opposite him a good way off, as it were a bowshot; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat opposite him, and lifted up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, ‘What ails you, Hagar? Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is’” (Bereishit 21:16-17).

There are two questions that can be derived from this paragraph and both questions lead to interesting answers, which certainly teach us a lot. The first question concerns the means of measurement. The Torah never uses the length of a bowshot in any other place, so why is it placed specifically here? Secondly, even though Hagar is the one that cries out to Hashem, Hashem is somehow able to hear the cries of Yishmael. Why is this?

To answer the first, Rashi points out that the bowshot is a subjective distance. Hagar is able to distance herself from the emotion of her son dying by moving two bowshots away. And while at first this seems considerate, upon further inspection, we see that Hagar was acting selfishly.

She wanted to get away from her son and not be impacted by the pain of the moment when, in fact, she should have been there with him to help him and ease his pain. And to prove this point, Hashem answers Yishmael rather than listening to Hagar's cries, because He knows that Hagar was being selfish. This answers the second question as well. Hashem answers Yishmael when Hagar was the one crying to emphasize that trying to distance oneself from others' pain is a mistake.

The Torah later goes on to tell us that Yishmael became an archer. Archers stand hundreds of feet away and are, therefore, able to distance themselves from the emotions and cries of pain that come from their victims. Yishmael actually followed the example of his mother in his later life.

What are we able to learn from this? We can learn that pain is important. To distance oneself from pain is to distance oneself from reality. Additionally, Hashem is teaching us that although we may be too selfish to perform an action thinking that no one will know, He will always know.

Pain is meant to teach us and we are meant to grow from it. However, living with only pain will cause one to go astray, like Yishmael. So, the lesson to be learned is that we must tread a fine line between happiness and pain, but we should always know that pain and hardships are there to teach us something. The pain of any situation will eventually fade, but the happiness in following Hashem's Torah will always remain.

Good Shabbos

## KEEPING THE FAITH

AYDEN FRANK (23')

This week's parsha, Parshat Vayeira, contains one of the most dramatic and cosmically important events in the history of humankind: Akeidat Yitchak. We know that Avraham was tested ten times and this is one of the tests he received. In the last paragraph of the parsha, it says that Avraham was told that his brother has another child. When Avraham was told this, he had just almost killed his only son that he had waited a long time for and now his brother, who is a rasha, had yet another child.

Rabbi Eli Mansour shares a fascinating insight. Bearing in mind what Avraham had just done, we can appreciate that this too was a test. Avraham undoubtedly passed this test like all the other ones and he maintained his faith in Hashem, setting an example for all Jews. He truly exemplified what it is like to have trust in Hashem, even through troubling times.



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