



Midrash - Parashat Vayeira

- I. And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. (Gen. 18:1)
- A. According to the sages, Abraham is sitting at the door of his tent on the 3rd day after his circumcision which took place in the previous verses. Because he extended hospitality with such zeal in a time he was in so much pain, the sages attribute great merit to him.
1. "He hath put forth his hands against them that were at peace with him; he hath profaned his covenant." Psalm 55:21(20)
- a) This passage is used by R. Levi in Bereishit Rabbah (48:8) to claim that Abraham sits at the gates of Gehenna and prevents any circumcised Jew from entering. The Hebrew phrase, **שָׁלַח יָדָיו**, **בְּשִׁלְמֵי** is interpreted to say, "He hath sent forth his hands to those that were whole." R. Levi used this interpretation (i.e. "whole") as his prooftext. However, he has reversed the intended meaning of the text at the pashat level.
- b) In its original context, this phrase is an accusation against the wicked. It says, "He hath put forth his hands against them that were at peace with him," meaning that he has broken covenant with those with whom he was at peace. R. Levi spins this into something positive, meaning that he (Abraham) extends his hand to aid those who are circumcised (i.e. "whole").
- II. "I [will] bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves [lit. stay your heart]" (18:5)
- A. The sages relate this passage to Ps. 104:15 which says:

You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth **and wine to gladden**

the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart. (Psalm 104:14-15)

1. Through a connection to another psalm (which is referenced as Psalm 48:17, but doesn't exist) R. Hiyya says that the *yetzer hara* will have no sway over mankind in the Messianic Era.
 - B. Because of Abraham's kindness & hospitality (particularly by giving his guests water in an arid land) the sages say that his descendants will be repaid in the Messianic future in a number of ways:
 1. Living waters will flow out of Jerusalem
 2. Hashem will wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion
 3. Hashem will shelter Israel from the heat with a pavilion
 4. Hashem will provide them with rich produce
 5. Their livestock will be abundant
 6. The presence of Hashem will be among the children of Israel
 - C. Because of Abraham's giving bread to the angelic beings, he merited that manna would be given to his descendants in the wilderness. (48:12)
- III. "And he stood by them under the tree while they ate." (Gen. 18:8)
- A. Do angels eat? No. They only pretended to eat, since they were in the presence of humans — just as Moses did not eat when he was in the presence of angelic beings on Mt. Sinai.
 - B. R. Tanhuma in R. Eleazar's name and R. Abun in R. Meir's name said: The proverb runs, 'When in Rome, do as Rome does.'⁸ Above [in the celestial sphere] there is no eating and drinking; hence when Moses ascended on high he appeared like them [the angels], as it says, Then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights; I did neither eat bread nor drink water (Deut. IX, 9). But below, where there is eating and drinking, we find, AND HE STOOD BY THEM UNDER THE TREE, AND THEY DID EAT. Did they then eat? They pretended to eat, removing each course in turn. (38:14)
- IV. The midrash tells us that after Abraham blessed strangers with food and drink, he taught his many guest that they should bless God.
- A. FOR I HAVE KNOWN HIM, TO THE END THAT HE MAY COMMAND HIS

CHILDREN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AFTER HIM THAT THEY MAY KEEP THE WAY OF THE LORD, TO DO RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE-ZEDAKAH U-MISHPAT (XVIII, 19). R. Aha said in R. Alexandri's name: This (tzedakah) refers to his hospitality [to wayfarers].¹-The Rabbis said: It refers to visiting the sick. R. 'Azariah said in R. Judah's name: First tzedakah and then mishpat (justice): how is this to be understood? Abraham used to receive wayfarers. After they had eaten and drunk he would say to them, 'Now recite Grace.' 'What shall we say?' they asked. 'Blessed be the God of the Universe of whose bounty we have partaken,' he replied. If one consented to recite grace, he would [be allowed to] eat, drink, and depart. But if one refused, he would demand, 'Pay me what you owe me.' 'Why, what do I owe you?' he would reply. 'One xestes' of wine costs ten follera, a pound of meat costs ten follera; a round of bread costs ten follera. Who will give you wine in the wilderness; who will give you meat in the wilderness; who will give you bread in the wilderness?' Seeing himself thus driven into a corner, he would say, 'Blessed be the God of the Universe of whose bounty we have eaten.' Hence TZEDAKAH is written first and then MISHPAT. (49:4)

- V. When the angels told Abraham they were going to destroy Sodom & Gomorrah, he immediately began interceding on their behalf.
 - A. First, we see the righteousness of Abraham being greater than that of Noach in that he interceded on behalf of the wicked.
 - B. Next, he begins by asking if they would destroy the cities if 50 righteous men were found within them. He ends with 10. Why did he stop at 10?
 - 1. Because at the generation of the Flood eight righteous people yet remained,' and the world was not given a respite for their sake. Another reason, why ten? Because he thought that there were ten there, viz. Lot, his wife, his four daughters and four sons-in-law. (49:13)
- VI. Wickedness of Sodom & Gomorrah
 - A. Sodomite Laws (p.166 The Midrash Says)
 - B. The lodging of Eliezer
 - C. Lot's daughter who helped the poor

D. The Sodomite Hedor and his schemings

VII. The Akeidah

A. Hashem calls upon Abraham to offer up Isaac.

1. Doubling of Abraham's name - a sign of tenderness
2. The midrash says that Abraham was confused as to which son Hashem wanted him to offer up:
 - a) Said He to him: TAKE, I PRAY THEE -I beg thee¹-THY SON. ' ' Which son? ' he asked. THINE ONLY SON. replied He. But each is the only one of his mother? -WHOM THOU LOVEST. - Is there a limit to the affections? ' ' EVEN ISAAC, ' said He. (56:7)

B. How did Abraham confirm the location of the offering?

1. ON THE THIRD DAY, etc. AND SAW THE PLACE AFAR OFF (ib.). What did he see?³ He saw a cloud enveloping the mountain,⁴ and said: 'It appears that that is the place where the Holy One, blessed be He, told me to sacrifice my son.' [siman 2] He then said to him [Isaac]: 'Isaac, my son, seest thou what I see?' 'Yes,' he replied. Said he to his two servants: ' See ye what I see? ' ' No,' they answered. Since ye do not see it, ABIDE YE HERE WITH THE ASS,' (XXII, 5), he bade them, for ye are like the ass, whence it follows that slaves are like an ass. (56:1-2)
2. The ass was one of the things created on the sixth day of Creation:
 - a) Abraham rose up early in the morning, and he took with him Ishmael, and Eliezer, and Isaac his son, and he saddled the ass. Upon this ass did Abraham ride. This was the ass, the offspring of that ass which was created during the twilight, as it is said, "And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass". The same ass was also ridden upon by Moses when he came to Egypt, as it is said, "And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon the ass" (Ex. iv. 20). This same ass will be ridden the future by the Son of David, as it is said, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." (Zech. ix. 9). (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 31)

- C. The sages attribute many rewards to the Jewish people due to Abraham's desire to worship him truly.
1. R. Isaac said: Everything happened as a reward for worshipping. 7 Abraham returned in peace from Mount Moriah only as a reward for worshipping: AND WE WILL WORSHIP AND WE WILL COME BACK TO YOU. Israel were redeemed only as a reward for worshipping: And the people believed... then they bowed their heads and worshipped (Ex. IV, 31). The Torah was given only as a reward for worshipping: And worship ye afar off (ib. XXIV, 1).⁸ Hannah was remembered only as a reward for worshipping: And they worshipped before the Lord (I Sam. I, 19). The exiles will be reassembled only as a reward for worshipping: And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great horn shall be blown; and they shall come that were lost... and that were dispersed... and they shall worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem (Isa. XXVII, 13). The Temple was built only as a reward for worshipping: Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His holy hill (Ps. XCIX, 9).⁹ The dead will come to life again only as a reward for worshipping: O come, let us worship and bend the knee; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker (Ps. XCV, 6). (56:2)
- D. The midrash says that Isaac carried the wood on his back like a man carries his own cross:
1. AND ABRAHAM TOOK THE WOOD OF THE BURNT - OFFERING (XXII, 6)-like one who carries his stake on his shoulder. (56:3)
- E. Abraham & Isaac went to Moriah in a similar fashion:
1. AND THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER (ib.): one to bind and the other to be bound, one to slaughter and the other to be slaughtered. (56:3)
- F. Did Isaac really die?
1. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from

which, figuratively speaking [lit. "in a parable" - παραβολη], he did receive him back." (Hebrews 11:17-19)

2. Rabbi Jehudah said : When the blade touched his neck, the soul of Isaac fled and departed, (but) when he heard His voice from between the two Cherubim, saying (to Abraham), "Lay not thine hand upon the lad " (Gen. xxii. 12), his soul returned to his body, and (Abraham) set him free, and Isaac stood upon his feet. And Isaac knew that in this manner the dead in the future will be quickened. He opened (his mouth), and said : Blessed art thou, O Lord, who quickeneth the dead. (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 31)
- G. Isaac, knowing his physical and emotional limitations, requested that his father bind him tightly that he might not flinch and disqualify himself as an offering:
1. R. Isaac said: When Abraham wished to sacrifice his son Isaac, he said to him: 'Father, I am a young man and am afraid that my body may tremble through fear of the knife and I will grieve thee, whereby the slaughter may be rendered unfit and this will not count as a real sacrifice; therefore bind me very firmly. Forthwith, HE BOUND ISAAC: can one bind a man thirty-seven years old? (another version: twenty-six years old)¹ without his consent? Presently, AND ABRAHAM STRETCHED FORTH. HIS HAND-he stretched forth his hand to take the knife while the tears streamed from his eyes, and these tears, prompted by a father's compassion, dropped into Isaac's eyes. (56:8)
- H. One day redemption will come through the sound of the shofar:
1. AND ABRAHAM LIFTED UP HIS EYES, AND LOOKED, AND BEHOLD BEHIND HIM (AHAR) A RAM (XXII, 13). What does A H A R mean? Said R. Judan: After all that happened,¹ Israel still fall into the clutches of sin and [in consequence] become the victims of persecution; yet they will be ultimately redeemed by the ram's horn, as it says, And the Lord God will blow the horn, etc. (Zech. IX, 14). (56:9)
 2. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa said : From that ram, which was created at the twilight, nothing came forth which was useless. The ashes of the ram were the base 'which was upon the top of the inner altar. The sinews of

the ram were the strings of the harp whereon David played. The ram's skin was the girdle (around) the loins of Elijah, may he be remembered for good, as it is said, "And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins " (2 Kings i. 8). The horn of the ram of the left side (was the one) wherein He blew upon Mount Sinai, as it is said, "And it shall come to pass, that when the ram's horn soundeth long" (Josh. vi. 5). (The horn) of the right side, which is larger than that of the left, is destined in the future to be sounded in the world that is to come, as it is said, And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great trumpet shall be blown" (Isa. xxvii. 13); and it is said, "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth" (Zech. xiv. 9). (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 31)

3. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

- I. Abraham requested that the offering of the lamb be considered as if he had offered up his only son:
 1. AND ABRAHAM WENT AND TOOK THE RAM, AND OFFERED HIM UP FOR A BURNT-OFFERING IN THE STEAD OF HIS SON (ib.). R. Judan said in R. Banai's name: He prayed to him: 'Sovereign of the Universe! Look upon the blood of this ram as though it were the blood of my son Isaac; its emurim as though they were my son's emurim,' even as we learned³: When a man declares: This animal be instead of this one, in exchange for that, or a substitute for this, it is a valid exchange ⁴ R. Phinehas said in R. Banai's name, He prayed: ' Sovereign of the Universe! Regard it as though I had sacrificed my son Isaac first and then this ram instead of him,' [IN THE STEAD being understood] as in the verse, And Jotham his son reigned in his stead (II Kings XV, 7).⁵ It is even as we learned⁶: [When one declares I vow a sacrifice] like the lamb or like the animals of the Temple stalls,⁷ R. Johanan said: He meant, like the lamb of the daily burnt-offering⁸: Resh Lakish said: He meant, like

Isaac's ram.⁹ There [in Babylon] they say: Like the offspring of a sin-offering. Bar Kappara taught: He meant, like the lamb which has never given suck. (56:9)

- J. After the Akeidah, we only read of Abraham returning — not Isaac. Where was he?
 - 1. SO ABRAHAM RETURNED UNTO HIS YOUNG MEN (XXII, 19). And where was Isaac? R. Berekiah said in the name of the Rabbis of the other place⁷: He sent him to Shem to study Torah. (56:11)