

עֵפְרַת הַשָּׁבוּעַ

A Weekly Torah Publication from the Students of Mesivta Ateres Yaakov
Ruth & Hyman Simon High School

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THE IMPORTANCE OF KINDNESS

Nossi Friedman, 12th Grade

This week's *parsha* illustrates to us the extremely important contrast between the nation of Israel and the nation of Sodom. One of the great characteristics of the Jewish people is our abundant acts of kindness. Whether it be handing a dollar to the poor on your way to *shacharis*, or donating large amounts to help *tzedaka* institutions, our nation is constantly involved in charities.

Sodom and the cities around it represented the epitome of how selfishness with regard to monetary matters can destroy a culture. They became so unified with their greed, that they did not allow those seeking work in their land to do so. Indeed, they would be so cruel and torturous, that people ceased to travel to Sodom, lest they never return alive. Even within the confines of its borders, it became an actual crime to feed the hungry or aid the poor. Furthermore, according to one opinion from our Sages, the rampant sexual perversion in Sodom was only instigated in order to dissuade one from becoming a part in their 'civilization' and benefiting from their economy. Such was the greed in Sodom that Hashem determined they had forfeited their right to exist.

Yet we see that before Hashem carried out the destruction of Sodom, He delayed His destroying angels because Avraham stepped forward to pray on behalf of the sinning cities. The Sforno points out that this teaches us that the gate of repentance is always open

to sinners, if only *teshuvah* would be put into gear. We see that Avraham attempts to bargain with Hashem by asking, "What if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom, would you not spare the city for their sake?" Hashem concedes to this request and says that He would. Avraham continues, repeatedly asking if there are forty-five righteous people will Hashem save them? If there are forty? If there are thirty? If there are twenty? For the sake of ten, will Hashem yet save them? Each time Hashem acquiesces, saying He will not destroy if there are forty-five... if there are forty, thirty, twenty, or even if there are only ten. Then

(Continued on page 2)

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Yaakov Sonnenblick, 12th Grade

In the beginning of this week's *parsha*, after the three malachim (angels) came to Avraham Avinu, the Torah tells us, "בנחת העל ויאכלו [יתחן]", עמד עליכם, and he [Avraham] stood over them under the tree and they [the malachim] ate."

There is an obvious question here that just smacks you in the face. How is it *shayich* for these malachim to eat? Angels are not physical beings! Did they trust Avraham's *kashrus* over any other human and throughout history only eat by him? Is there something at work over here?

The Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba states, [יג: ב] "In the merit of that *tzaddik* [Avraham] and as a reward for all the effort he made, Hashem opened their mouths and they ate." From here we see that in the *zechus* of the righteous Avraham, Hashem performed a miracle that allowed the malachim to eat.

This answer seems very nice, except for the fact that it seems like a straight contradiction to an event later on in the *parsha*! After these "men" left Avraham, two of them went together to Sidom; one to destroy the city and the other to save Avraham's nephew, Lot (his location describes his essence). For their protection, Lot offered them to stay with him for the night, but stressed that they must be up and out early the next morning. The Torah tells us there, "ויעש להם משתה ומצות אפה ויאכל [יט:ג], He made a feast for them, baked matzos, and they ate." Did Lot have the same merits which Avraham Avinu had? How then, according to our answer, was it possible for the malachim to eat by the house of Lot?

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<i>The Importance Of Kindness</i>	1
<i>You Are What You Eat</i>	1
<i>Stories of Tzaddikim</i>	3
<i>Gematria</i>	3
<i>Emes L'Yaakov</i>	4

*Daylight Savings Time Ends
Move Clock Back One Hour*

NOSSI FRIEDMAN (continued from page 1)

something interesting happens. At that point Avraham stops pressing for salvation, and he allows Hashem to carry out the destruction. The obvious question is why did he stop? Once he proceeded to ask Hashem to save the cities for the sake of less and less merits, why did he not keep going and beg for salvation even for the sake of one righteous man who might live in the vicinity?

I heard an interesting explanation regarding this from Rabbi Eli Goodman of Congregation Bachuri Chemed in Long Beach, NY. He began by questioning why Noach is not acclaimed as a man of kindness? After all, he selflessly tended to the needs of all the animals throughout the duration of their stay on the *teiva*. The answer is that if he were a true man of kindness, he would have made sure the *mabul* never happened, by reaching out to be *mekarev* the people of his generation, and bring them back to being good. In fact, the *mabul* is called "*Mei Noach*," "Noach's Flood," implying that it was in some way his fault, that because of his lack of effort on behalf of wicked people around him the world was wiped out. Had he been a true man of kindness, sincerely loving every one of Hashem's creations, he would have made that extra effort in order to stop the *mabul*, and we do not find mentioned in the Torah that he prayed to Hashem not to send this severe punishment to the world.

Ten generations later, however, we meet someone who seems to be the quintessential man of kindness. Avraham had *mesiras nefesh* to be *mekarev* the people of his generation to Hashem. He had great success in this, making many people abandon idols and do *teshuvah*. Avraham did this throughout all his travels, and wherever he lived he would keep all sides of his tent open to the desert wayfarers in the hope of being able to fulfill the mitzvah of *hachnosas orchim*, while bringing an understanding and love for Hakadosh Baruch Hu into the lives of everyone he encountered. A great example of this can be seen from the beginning of this week's *parsha*, where we find Avraham, still in pain, recovering from his

circumcision, nevertheless running out into the heat of the day to greet desert wayfarers, and hastily preparing and serving them an elaborate meal. Then we read of Avraham's great kindness and mercy in stepping forward and with extreme

(continued on page 3)

YAAKOV SONNENBLICK (continued from page 1)

To answer this question, we must look at what eating is all about. The simple *pshat* is that we are feeding our bodies to keep us healthy and stay alive, which is definitely true. Yet there is more to eating than that. When we make a bracha on a nice vegetable, some meat, or on *geshmake* fire-poppers that comes from lower forms of life than us, we are bringing the lower spirit of an animal to a higher form of kedusha; to that of a human.

We can now answer our question as to how the malachim could eat food; something not usually done by angels. Even though they acted like real men, they were still angels, and kept their connection to the *Abishte*. By them eating the food, it would normally bring the food to a greater level of kedusha, but this was not possible in the tent of our forefather. The gemara states in *Maseches Sanhedrin* [צג], "Tzaddikim are far greater than angels." The greater a person is, the more impact of kedushah he will have on his food. With this principle in mind, we come to realize that Avraham Avinu's eating had a much greater impact compared to that of the malachim! Therefore, what is the purpose of their eating? The malachim received no nourishment and their *koach* on the food would not be as strong as Avraham's! The

only reason they would eat food would be because of the merits of Avraham Avinu.

The reasoning by the tent of Avraham Avinu surely doesn't explain the malachim's eating by his nephew Lot. Rather than eating in the merit of Lot, the malachim's consumption by him was to bring the food to a greater level of kedusha. It is the household of Avraham that bothers Chazal as to why the malachim ate, but not Lot's house, because their impact would not have such an effect by the house of the tzaddik. The only way the malachim ate by Avraham was surely a miracle. Avraham was such a humble person, that he would never imagine himself greater than malachim, and it was therefore preferable for the "travelers" to eat the food and bring it up to their "meager" level of malachim in deference to Avraham's humility. to keep Avraham's self image.

It is very important to keep this in mind. Although a London Broil Steak can be very, very (very) scrumptious and delicious, with the right *kavanos* we can also bring up the meat's level of kedusha. With Hashem's help, let us reach the level where the gemara's statement that, "Tzaddikim are far greater than angels" apply to us as well. *Gut Shabbos Yidden!*

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STORIES OF TZADDIKIM

Reb Dov Ber, better known as the Maggid of Mezeritch became the successor to the Baal Shem Tov in spreading his Torah and wisdom to Klal Yisroel. After the Maggid had already become his disciple, the Baal Shem Tov asked a talmid who was due to pass through Mezeritch to convey his regards. With great difficulty the messenger found the Maggid's small and neglected home. Upon entering the Maggid's poor abode, the visitor found Reb Dov Ber seated on a rough block of wood. Before him were his talmidim seated on planks of wood supported by similar blocks of wood. The only other furniture in the room was a wooden table.



As the Maggid was in the midst of teaching, the visitor agreed to return later. When he did so, he found the scene changed. The talmidim had gone; the "table" had been converted into a "bed"; the Maggid was still seated on the block of wood, studying alone. The visitor could not hide his astonishment at the conditions in which the great Maggid lived. "I am far from wealthy," he said, "but in my home you will find a chair, a bench, a bed and other home furnishings."

"At home," replied his host, "one indeed needs a chair, a bed, a table and a lamp. But on a journey things are different."

To the Maggid his earthly dwelling was not his "home." Here on earth he was but a sojourner and, as such, only those values which bring the traveler to his ultimate destination were of real and lasting importance.

ה'פקד את שרה [כא:א]

by Tzadok Picker

AND HASHEM REMEMBERED SARAH

This pasuk introduces the miracle of Sarah Imeinu becoming pregnant and giving birth to her only son Yitzchak. This parsha describes a true miracle, that Sarah who naturally could not give birth was now able to do so in her old age - truly a *chesed* from Hashem.

Yet that was not all. The Baal HaTurim explains that the *gematria* of, "פקד את שרה," is equal to the words, "אף כל העקרות פקד," *even all the barren women gave birth*. What a true miracle. Such was the *gadlus* of Sarah Imeinu; that through her constant tefillos and *maasim tovim*, not only she but also all the other women were now able to bear children. This is most likely because someone like Sarah could not imagine receiving such an amazing gift without sharing its greatness with others. With intentions like that, how could Hashem turn her down?

NOSSI FRIEDMAN (continued from page 2)

earnestness pleading with Hashem to spare the wicked cities of Sodom, begging repeatedly to save them with fewer and fewer merits. (Parenthetically, another interesting contrast between Avraham and Noach, is that we often find Avraham waking up extra early and running and hastening to do Hashem's will; whereas by Noach there is no mention of him doing anything particularly speedily or early in the morning)

Yet we find that even Avraham did not achieve the perfect personification of kindness. If he had, he would have continued pleading with Hashem to save Sodom even for the sake of just one righteous person living there. This is why the person we now know as the model of kindness is Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe continued in the ways of Avraham, to do kindness and carry out Hashem's will as quickly as possible, only he reached even greater heights. Moshe had such a developed sense of love and compassion for all of Hashem's creatures, that he could not even ignore a single baby calf that had wandered astray - and since he did exert himself to find it, and brought it back to the fold, he merited becoming the leader of Klal Yisroel. We even find that after the sin with the golden calf, when Hashem threatened to destroy the

Jewish people and start a new nation from Moshe alone, that Moshe pleaded with Hashem not to do this, but to spare the Jewish people, and if not, then "*wipe me out of Your Book*." [It is brought down that with this extreme statement of selflessness and concern for others, Moshe succeeded in correcting the sin of Noach. This is hinted to in the Torah since the specific word that he said, "Mecheini," "wipe me out," is a rearrangement of the same letters that spell the words "Mei Noach," "Noach's Flood," and thereby the people were saved and not destroyed.]

We should take a lesson from this, to handle each and every conversation or transaction with the utmost love and care. How important is kindness? In what esteem does Hashem hold one's love for a fellow man? What can we do to improve our relationships with others? Give that extra dollar, go the extra mile, make that extra phone call. Now is the time my brothers and sisters! Hashem wants us. Israel needs us. We need each other! Let us come together and merit to see the revelation of Moshiach Tzidkeinu *bimherah b'yamenu*, amen!

אמת ליעקב

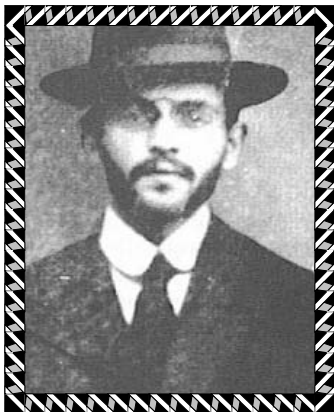
Weekly Insights from Moreinu HoRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l

גרש האמה הזאת ואת בנה כי לא יירש בן האמה הזאת אם בני אם יצחק (כא:ת)

Drive away this maidservant and her son, for this maidservant's son will not inherit with Yitzchak

The Torah tells us that Sarah observed Yishmoel committing *aveiros*, and requested that Avraham send him and his mother away, so that he would not have a negative influence on Yitzchak. She added that Yishmoel would not be one of Avraham's heirs anyway, and as such there was no reason for him to stay.

HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l asks two questions on Sarah's actions. First, at the time of this incident Avraham was about one hundred years old, and his father Terach was still alive. Why then was Sarah discussing who Avraham's heirs would be at this time? Wasn't this somewhat insensitive? Second, the Torah tells us that this story took place only after Yitzchak had grown up, and had reached the age where he was no longer dependant on his mother. However, the Midrash tells us that from the very day that Yitzchak was born, Yishmoel was bragging about how he, as the firstborn would receive a double portion. If so, why did Sarah wait until Yitzchak grew up before requesting that Yishmoel be sent away? Shouldn't she have done so as soon as she observed Yishmoel's ambitions?



R' Yaakov zt"l as a young man in Lomza

Rav Yaakov answers our first question in the following way. In ancient times, it was common practice for a man who had two wives to have separate tents for each wife and her children. Therefore, when Yitzchok was at the age where he was still dependant on his mother for all of his needs, he lived in Sarah's tent. However, Yishmoel who had already grown up, lived in Avraham's tent, so that Avraham could teach him proper observance of the *mitzvos*. It was only after Yitzchok grew up that he also moved into Avraham's tent in order to receive his tutelage in Torah and *mitzvos* adherence. Therefore, for the first portion of Yitzchak's life, indeed Sarah did not know about Yishmoel's boasting. It was only after Yitzchak grew up, and Sarah had a vested interest in the goings on in Avraham's tent, that she found out about Yishmoel's aspirations. Based on this concept, we can understand why it was appropriate for Sarah to bring up the issue of Avraham's inheritance. Sarah was not referring to Avraham's monetary inheritance, but rather to the spiritual inheritance of Torah and *mitzvos*. Sarah understood that Yishmoel was not fit to fill the role as the transmitter of the *mesorah*, and as such her request that Yishmoel be sent away was more than apt. The inheritance of this role was not something that waited until Avraham's death, and as such there was no problem with Sarah raising the issue at this point.

The fourth perek of Maseches Brachos begins, "The early chassidim (pious ones) would meditate and introspect for one hour before, and one hour after, davening."

Regarding the hour before davening, the mishnah states explicitly that the purpose of this introspection was to focus one's heart upon serving Hashem. Yet what is the purpose of the hour after tefillah? The gemara does not explain.

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l answers that during the course of davening one is inspired to improve himself and perfect his ways. However, during praying itself one is forbidden to stop and reexamine his life and consider practical means to improve his ways. One may not interrupt a session with the *Melech Malchei HaMilochim* to engage in self analysis.

This, then, is the purpose of the hour after davening. This time is to be devoted to practical implementation, to translating the inspiration into the concretization of personal improvement.

Reb Shlomo Zalman was once walking with someone in Shaarei Chesed during yeshiva intersession, when he asked a youth what time minchah was going to be. The boy innocently replied that he did not know.

Reb Shlomo Zalman was distressed by the boy's response. He quoted the above gemara and said, "Clearly, this boy cannot spend an hour in preparation if he doesn't know what time davening begins. . ."

M.A.Y.

of Greater L.I.
516 · 374 · 6465

AteresHaShavua@aol.com

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor In Chief

Avi Lieberman

Asst. Editor

Reuven Davies

Emes L'Yaakov

Ephraim Weiss

Contributing Editors

Yoni Feder

Nossi Friedman

Dovid Gerber

Tzadok Picker

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