



Cincinnati Torah

תורה
מסינסי

Vol. V, No. IV

New & Improved

Vayeira

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

RABBI ARYEH PRIDONOFF

More of the Same



HUMAN BEINGS CRAVE CONSISTENCY. ONE could even say that routine and consistency are vital for human growth and happiness. However, life often fights routine. In fact, we receive comparatively less credit for the years of stability. The greatest merits come from times of strife, when we had to tackle complicated situations and difficult tasks.

Enter this week's Torah portion. Lot grew up in our forefather Avraham's home, but he adopted some misguided views about life. Moving to Sodom, Lot surrounded himself with bad people, and he was affected by his them—negatively. Why was he saved?

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman describes an ap-

parent dispute between the great commentators Rashi and Ramban (Nachmanides). On one hand, Ramban explains that Lot created his own merit, by begging the angels to enter his home. Although he knew the residents of Sodom might kill him for his actions, he could not give up this act of *chesed*, kindness. The angels didn't want to enter the house of an unrighteous person, but his consistency in *chesed* was his saving grace. On the other hand, Rashi explains that Lot had merit much earlier. When Avraham told the Egyptian authorities that Sarah was his sister, Lot could have exposed his brother-in-law for great personal gain. Lot defeated

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A HALACHA FROM THE PARASHA

New!

RABBI CHAIM HEINEMANN

And Avraham went with them to escort them. (18:15)

When a guest leaves the home of his host, there is a special mitzvah of *levaya*, escorting the guest on his way. The Gemara (Sotah 46) adds, "Anyone who escorts his fellow for four cubits—between six and eight feet—[guarantees that his friend] will not suffer harm [on his journey]."

Rambam (Maimonides) emphasizes the great reward for escorting guests, and notes that this practice was instituted by our forefather Avraham, who would invite guests, feed them, and then escort

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New!

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DELVING DEEPER

RABBI EZRA STETTIN

The True Beneficiary



Did Avraham fulfill the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* (providing hospitality) or not?

This week's Torah portion begins with a somewhat perplexing occurrence. Hashem saw Avraham in anguish at his inability to fulfill the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, and so He sent three angels, disguised as men, to visit him, enabling Avraham to fulfill his desire to host. This begs the question: Why didn't Hashem send actual people? Further, did Avraham actually fulfill the mitzvah?

Let us ask one more question: After the angels informed Avraham that he would have a child, he probably realized that they were, in fact, angels in disguise. Yet we find that afterward he did the mitzvah of *levaya*, escorting guests. Why? What mitzvah is accomplished by doing *chesed* (kindness) to angels?

The answer to these questions seems to be that the point of *chesed* is not the benefit to others, but the benefit of the doer himself. We do find in other contexts, after the Torah was given, that the recipient

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THIS WEEK IN JEWISH HISTORY

New!

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

On 13 MarCheshvan, 5521 (1760), Hebrew siddurim were printed for the first time in North America. Hebrew printing in the United States had initially involved inserting isolated Hebrew words or phrases into English publications. (Hebrew type was actually included in the very first book printed in the U.S., an English translation of Psalms (Cambridge, 1640), just twenty years after the Pilgrims' arrival at Plymouth.) Hebrew and Yiddish newspapers were first circulated in 1874.

The first artifact of Hebrew printing from Cincinnati is dated 1824.

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parasha@cincynollel.org

sponsored by **Marc & Joy Rothenberg** in memory of three of Marc's grandparents, whose *yahrzeits* are this month—Hannah Rothenberg (12 Cheshvan), Pearl Weissman (1 Cheshvan), and Ben Weissman (20 Cheshvan),

Cincinnati Torah

is distributed weekly to local shuls and the community e-mail list.



A HALACHA FROM THE PARASHA

(CONTINUED)

them. Hosting guests, Rambam writes, is more precious than greeting the Divine Presence, and escorting guests is even greater than hosting them. Rambam concludes his discussion by citing our Sages' remark that someone who hosts guests but doesn't escort them is considered to be killing them—because he denies them the protection that they need as they travel to their next destination.

Escorting a person comes under the category of *g'milus chassadim* (performing acts of kindness) and also fulfills the mitzvah to love your fellow as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18). (Rambam, *Aveilus* 14:1)

A story is told of the Vilna Gaon (1720–1797) that demonstrates the importance of escorting guests. There was a man at that time who was renowned for his generous hospitality. He welcomed many guests and treated them with royalty. One day, a fire broke out in his home and burned the entire house. People approached the Vilna Gaon and asked how a home that had welcomed so many guests with such generosity could burn down. The Gaon answered by citing the verse in B'reishis (21:33), which relates that Avraham planted an "eshel." Rashi explains that this refers to Avraham's hospitality, as the Hebrew word eshel, spelled *aleph, shin, lamed*, stands for the words *achila* (eating), *sh'siya* (drinking), and *l'vaya* (escorting). The Gaon noted that if a person welcomes guests but does not escort them, fulfilling only *achila* and *sh'siya*, then instead of "eshel," he will only have "esh"—fire, Heaven forbid.

We will continue with some more specific *halachos* next week. 🕊

More of the Same CONTINUED

his urges, and because of that, he was saved.

So which one is it, consistency in *chessed*, or conquering the one-time desire to turn over Avraham?

Rabbi Reisman resolves the case at hand. Like He does on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem judges us as we are, today. Past and future actions give us merits, but judgments are passed on the present person. According to this explanation, Lot did merit salvation because of his previous actions, but he had

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Rabbi Moshe D. Zeffren.. 9:30–10:30 AM

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Rabbi Avrohom Weinrib..... 10 AM–noon



Monday

👤👉 Torah Treasures for Seniors at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

Tuesday

👤👉 Partners in Torah at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Michael Soroka..... 8 PM

Wednesday

👤👉 Downtown Lunch-n- Learn at Strauss & Troy

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM

Thursday

👉👉 Halacha

in the former Back Office

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann..... 9:10–10 PM

Homemade refreshments served.

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The True Beneficiary CONTINUED

of a *chessed* was also taken into account in the mitzvah. However, it would seem that before the Torah was given, making oneself into a doer of *chessed* was, in itself, a fulfillment of the mitzvah. (For further reading,

see the introduction to *Ru'ach Chayim* and *T'shuvos Chasam Sofer* Y.D. 155.) Thus, 260 years before the Torah was given, this was all Avraham yearned for, and Hashem sent him the angels to achieve this end. 🕊

PARASHA PONDERABLE

RABBI EZRA STETTIN

Rashi quotes the Midrash, which says that each of the angels that visited Avraham had its own mission, because a *mal'ach* (angel) can only fulfill one mission at a time. The difficulty in this is that every one of these *mal'achim* was fulfilling **two** directives, because they were also sent to be guests of Avraham! 🕊

to prove to the angels that he was still worthy.

As Jews, we do not sit on our laurels. We work hard and push ourselves. Our actions are accounted for, and we seek to improve ourselves. However, each of us must have a baseline. Without this baseline, we don't know what we are building on. How can we grow if we don't know what we're adding to? It has to be consistent. Whatever we see as "our mitzvos," we must stick to them. We cannot compromise. 🕊



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