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9 years of Points to Ponder on Parashas Vayera

**וַיֵּרָ֤א אֵלָיו֙ יְהֹוָ֔ה  Hashem appeared to him (18:1)** – Why does this section begin with VaYera and not VaYomer as was with all of the instances before? The Midrash comments that this was after the Bris Milah which means that the relationship with Hashem changed (MeeBisari Echezeh Elokim). But what really changed after the Bris? Also, why not mention that he appeared to Avraham – why Eilav? **Rav Betzalel Rudinsky Shlita** explained that in the same way a person is different than a Malach because he can still grow and change – whether as a baby at the time of Bris or even at 99 like Avraham at his Bris. This is a critical message provided to every man (not just Avraham) at the beginning of this week’s parasha. Moreover, this change is not only in word – Hashem literally appears to the one who makes these changes in his life BECAUSE he is ready to make those changes (maybe that is why the sun is a healing agent – as we are more like the moon and the sun and its stagnating heat are not able to grow and thus is subservient to our power too).

**וַיֵּרָ֤א אֵלָיו֙ יְהֹוָ֔ה Hashem appeared to him (18:1)** – **Ramban**notes the position of **Rambam** that the entire opening episode of this week’s Parasha from opening until after Avraham debates Hashem about not destroying Sodom was a Chizayon (some sort of dream). Not only does Ramban disagree, he rejects such a suggestion as against the truth of Torah as the opening words state that these things actually happened. **Rav Dovid HaNazir ztl**. notes that the Ramban’s strong opposition might be based in his Christian surroundings whereby he wanted to combat any thought that the Shechina could be split into three parts (as with the Chizyon of three malachim) while Rambam came from a Moslem environment and feared seeing the world split into demons and ghosts like the folk tales of the culture near him. Hence the debate. **Rav Uri Sherki** defends the position of Rambam noting that the fact that the Torah ends the episode with a recognition that Avraham got up early – does seem to suggest that there is room to argue that the preceding occurred while he slept. The debate moves on.

**בְּאֵֽלֹנֵ֖י מַמְרֵ֑א** **In the tents of Mamre (18:1)** – **Rashi** explains that Mamre was the one who suggested the idea of following through on the Bris. **Daas Zekeinim** wonder what kind of advice Avraham needed. In one of their answers, they suggest that Avraham wasn’t sure how to convince the other members of his household to do milah. Mamre told him that if he performs milah first, the members of his household will follow suit. **Rav Eli Zwickler Shlita quoted Rav Henoch Leibowitz ztl**. who notes that one could have presented the opposite argument. After the milah, Avraham was weak and his ability to inspire others would be limited. Why did Mamre advise the opposite and why did Avraham listen? R. Leibowitz notes that we see from here that the best way to teach and inspire is by example.

**וְה֛וּא ישֵׁ֥ב פֶּֽתַח־הָאֹ֖הֶל** **And he was sitting at the opening of the Tent (18:1) – Rashi** cites the fact that Avraham sought to rise and Hashem told him to sit and that HE would stand as a sign that in the future judges would sit in the debates of Dinei Torah. What is the connection between the sitting of Avraham and the sitting of the Dayanim? **Rav Simcha Zissel Broide ztl.** of Chevron Yeshiva suggested that in the same way that Avraham debated each and every action while in the presence of Hashem, Dayanim too, will debate and act the same way. Rav Simcha Zissel adds that we learn from here that one who contemplates the paths of Hashem will be Zocheh to Yeshuas Hashem.

**וְה֛וּא ישֵׁ֥ב פֶּֽתַח־הָאֹ֖הֶל He was sitting at the door of his tent (18:1) - Rav Dr. Abraham J. Twerski ztl** noted that Avraham highlights a different type of person. Many of us have a hard time concentrating on Tefillah because we are distracted by our own affairs. Avraham was the personality who thinks of Hashem even while being involved in his own affairs and is therefore the man of Chesed. The egocentric person cannot find room for Hashem and certainly not another person. But if one is not at the center of his universe and can look beyond himself, he can see others and have room for Hashem and Chessed.

ו**ְה֛וּא ישֵׁ֥ב פֶּֽתַח־הָאֹ֖הֶל  And he was sitting in front of the tent(18:1)** – **Rashi** explains that Avraham wanted to stand but Hashem told him that you are like a Beis Din and in the future they will sit. What is the connection to Din**? Rav Schachter Shlita quoted Rav Soloveitchik ztl**. who explained that the Malachim were heading to destroy Sodom and that Avraham was Michayev the Reshaim of Sodom because he was nice when they were not. They couldn’t blame the circumstances. There are many times in life that people claim that life circumstances prevented them from doing the right thing. Those that do it, are Michayeiv those who fail, for their failings.

**וַיִּשָּׂ֤א עֵינָיו֙ וַיַּ֔רְא And he lifted his eyes and he saw (18:2) - The Alter of Kelm and the Alter of Slabodka** both question why we need a double reference to the idea that Avraham saw the 3 men. Why the double language? Both explain that the Torah wants us to understand that every action taken by Avraham was always calculated. In the same way that he controlled his hands, he controlled his eyes. First, he needed to lift his eyes in order to see what he wanted to, he looked in order to achieve his mission, and then VaYar - he was able to see that which he set out to look for.

**וַיִּשָּׂ֤א עֵינָיו֙ וַיַּ֔רְא And he lifted his eyes and saw three people standing over him and he got up and ran from the tent opening (18:2)** – So here is Avraham, in the midst of a conversation with Hashem – no bigger a spiritual experience than that – and he gets up to go greet the Orchim. This is the source of the Gemara’s statement that Hachnasas Orchim is more important than greeting the Shechina. But how did Avraham know that? The **Brisker Rav ztl.**answers that greeting the Shechina is perhaps a spiritual experience but isn’t a Mitzva. Hachnasas ORchim IS a Mitzvah and pushes off all other “spiritual experiences”  in that  the ultimate spiritual experience is doing Mitzvos.

**יֻקַּח־נָ֣א מְעַט־מַ֔יִם** **Let a little water be taken please (18:4) – Rashi** explains that this was done via an agent. Hashem repaid this process through an agent as well when Moshe hit the rock and the water came out. The author of **the Bnei Shlomo** assumes that this was some form of punishment and asks why Avraham was punished.  Why did he need to pour the water himself? He explains that had Hashem given the water directly instead of via a Shaliach, then Moshe would not have hit the rock and would have led Bnei Yisrael into the land. Ergo, then Hashem would not have been able to exile them which would’ve put us into tremendous jeopardy. Using the agent allowed Avraham to protect his children.

**וְהֽוּא־עֹמֵ֧ד עֲלֵיהֶ֛ם תַּ֥חַת הָעֵ֖ץ וַיֹּאכֵֽלוּ** **And he was standing on top of them under the tree, and they ate (18:8)** – **Rashi**reminds us of the miracle that the Malachim went through in order to appear as if they were eating. Why was it so important to highlight these Nissim? **Rav Shaul Yisraeli ztl (Siach Shaul)** answers utilizing a famous Midrash (Berashis Rabba 45:4) which highlights the difference between wheat kernels and thorns. There is a way to grow thorns and a way to grow wheat. When you leave things to grow naturally on a field, you wind up with weeds and thorns. Wheat only grows if you put time and effort into field. The same was true about Avraham’s home. It too, could not be left to chance or nature to let things grow right – the desired efforts would only result after effort which would come through hard work as well as intervention by Hashem similar to a miracle. Thus, Hashem surrounded him with them to remind Avraham not to give up.

**וַתִּצְחַ֥ק שָׂרָ֖ה בְּקִרְבָּ֣הּ Sarah laughed internally (18:12) - Rashi** notes that she looked at herself and questioned if it were possible that her post menopausal body could again have kids. **Ramban** questions why we hold Sarah at fault for the laughter. After all, she did not see the men and perhaps didn’t know that they were legitimate Malachim. Why fault her? If some strange person from another religion came and offered a ‘blessing” would we also be liable for not believing it? **Rav Yehuda Segal, the Manchester ztl**. explained that Hashem created the world and has never stopped the creative process each and every day. If He wants to do something, He can. The problem was not in the fact that she didn’t believe in THEIR blessing, it was that she didn’t believe Hashem could do it on His decision. She was cynical about the possibility and cynicism and Bitachon do not go together.

**וַתִּצְחַ֥ק שָׂרָ֖ה בְּקִרְבָּ֣הּ And Sarah laughed internally (18:12)** – Why is it so important to focus on Sarah’s laughter? And why embarrass her so – forever? **Rav Chanan Porat ztl** suggested that Sarah’s laughter was so hidden inside her that only Hashem who is Chofeis Kol Chadrei Baten was able to know it. Perhaps Sarah herself didn’t realize it – Ki Yireiah – for she was a Yireiyah Shomayim! So why did Hashem call her out on the momentary unconscious laughter? Rav Porat suggests that even unconscious destructive mockery can make a person decide s/he won’t try. Hashem didn’t want to castigate Sarah, he wanted her to fix the middah – and she does! She turns the Tzichok into a positive force of belief in Hashem and into her raison d’etra.

**הַֽמֲכַסֶּ֤ה אֲנִי֙ מֵֽאַבְרָהָ֔ם** **Do I hide from Avraham that which I do (18:17)** – Why does Hashem reveal to Avraham that he intends to destroy Sodom**? Rav Schachter Shlita** notes that the simple understanding of the possuk was whether it was right to hide it. However, the Midrash explains that the possuk can also mean “Is it possible to hide from Avraham”. Rav Schachter explained that in the same way that Avraham was able to understand the Torah by studying the world, he would also be able to figure out what the world plan of Hashem was. And even though the people of Sodom thwarted Avraham’s efforts of Kriyah B’shem Hashem, he needed to try to act on their behalves.

**וְאַ֨בְרָהָ֔ם הָי֧וֹ יִֽהְיֶ֛ה לְג֥וֹי גָּד֖וֹל וְעָצ֑וּם** **And Avraham will be a huge nation (18:18)**– Hashem’s description of Avraham’s accolades are all based on future matters that have not taken place as yet. Why would this be a Zechus to him now? The **Nesivos Shalom** explains that Avraham was so humble he did not count his own individuality as significant. Therefore, Hashem noted that it was not Avraham’s own status that made him worthy. Rather it was the new style of Avodas Hashem – that of setting precedent for future generations to follow – that made him singularly deserving of Hashem’s benevolence.

**כִּ֣י יְדַעְתִּ֗יו** **For I know him, that he will command his children and his household to follow his example, that they will preserve the way of God, to perform righteousness and judgment. (18:19)-** What is this “Way of Hashem”? How is Avraham supposed to teach it? **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ztl**. pointed out that the simplest way of understanding this expression is to interpret "the way of God" as the attempt to imitate God and to behave in the way that He appears to us to behave. He adds that **Rambam** assumes that the “Way of Hashem” is the golden mean. Rav Lichtenstein suggests that Rambam learns this from the contrast of Tzedakka and Mishpat as opposed to Chessed and Mishpat. Rambam is suggesting that a  person who strives to exist in a constant state of religious ecstasy, spending his life dancing in the streets with intense fervor, may well experience some lofty and uplifting moments in his Divine service, but he is also likely to end up in less desirable states.  A person who does not exercise any control over his spiritual level may reach levels that are not suitable for him – and fall into sin. In order to achieve lofty levels of religious upliftment, a person must first establish an orderly, structured way of life in which he controls his personality traits and characteristics.  When a person lives like this, he is able – at the appropriate time and place – elevate himself and achieve a very high level of loving God and cleaving to Him.  A life of moderation and control allows one to achieve – in a controlled manner – some special moments of extreme intensity.

**הַאַ֣ף תִּסְפֶּ֔ה צַדִּ֖יק עִם־רָשָֽׁע**: **Avraham approached and he said are you going to destroy a Tzaddik with a Rasha? (18:23)** – Is one obligated to daven for evil human beings**? Rav Schachter Shlita** pointed out that unless they are trying to destroy him, then he should daven for them – perhaps they will return to Derech Hashem. Even though the Sodomites ran a culture that was against the message of Hashem that  Avraham tried to preach, Avraham still davened for them. We should do the same.  We say Yitzamu Chaaim not Chotim.

**אוּלַ֥י יֵ֛שׁ חֲמִשִּׁ֥ים צַדִּיקִ֖ם בְּת֣וֹךְ הָעִ֑יר** **What if there were 50 Tzaddikim in the city? (18:24**) – One gets the impression that Avraham’s efforts were in vain. He bargained with Hashem from 50 Tzaddikim down to 10 and still lost. Why record the episode with such detail? **The Dubno Maggid** explains that Avraham DID get a major benefit from his experience – that Hashem WOULD spare a whole city as long as there are tzaddikim in its midst. While it did not save the Sodomites, it did serve as inspiration to Bnei Yisroel in Mitzrayim where a majority were not deserving of Geulah. Moshe promised them that the Geulah can come in the merit of the few.  **Rav Avraham HaKohein Pam ztl.** points out that we too, should take mission and consolation from this episode. On the one hand we can be consoled that even with the ever accelerating rate of intermarriage and assimilation, Hashem will not totally forsake us. On the other hand, we have the responsibility to uphold the world and do our part to make sure there are always enough Tzaddikim to cover the gaps.

**אוּלַ֥י יֵ֛שׁ חֲמִשִּׁ֥ים צַדִּיקִ֖ם Perhaps there are 50 Tzaddikim (18:24)** – Why does Avraham daven for the people of Sodom? Weren’t they sinners? **Rav Dessler ztl.** explained that when one is attached to life, s/he has hope. Midrash adds that Avraham used 3 aspects of prayer to try to achieve his mission: 1) understanding and awareness – that Hashem is the only one who can take care of the situation 2) appeasement –that Hashem grant a Mechila for sin and 3) attachment – that the Tzaddik davens that he is in distress with the situation wherever it is. These elements exist

**אַל־נָ֞א יִ֤חַר  Please do not be angry with me (18:30**) – Why would Avraham think Hashem would be angry? Doesn’t Hashem love the Tefillos of Tzaddikim? **Rav Aharon Shteinman ztl** explains in the name of the **Gra** that one must be careful to limit his words in front of Hashem. In other words, in front of Hashem, even one’s Tefillos should be focused and direct

**אוּלַ֛י יִמָּֽצְא֥וּן שָׁ֖ם עֲשָׂרָ֑ה Maybe there are 10 Tzaddikim in the city (18:32)** - It is interesting to see Avraham pleading on behalf of Sodom. Why is it that the Gemara (Shabbos 89b) notes that in the future Hashem will tell Avraham that his children have sinned and will be punished and Avraham will not stick up for US. Why the change in his policy? Why Sodom yes and his own children no? **Rav Kalman Baron ztl. (Menahel of Yeshivas Ponovitch)** explained that even Avraham Aveinu whose defense of humanity was unmatched in this world, needs to readjust his awareness of the danger of sin in the world of truth and declares Yimachu Al Kidushas Shimecha (that said, he wants his children to achieve the greatest Taharas HaCheit — Kiddush Hashem — in their deaths, assuring them of atonement.)

**וַיָּבֹ֖אוּ אֶל־בֵּית֑וֹ** **And they came to his house (19:3) – Rav Dovid Soloveitchik Shlita**noted that when it came to the Hachnasas Orchim of Avraham, it does not mention that he brought the Malachim to his HOUSE. Yet, in regard to Lot, the fact that it was to his house is expressed a lot. Why? Rav Dovid Soloveitchik explained that when it came to the Hachnasas Orchim in Avraham’s house, each guest was made to feel as if he owned the place. Lot’s Hachnasas Orchim, although great, did not reach THIS level.

**וַיַּ֤עַשׂ לָהֶם֙ מִשְׁתֶּ֔ה וּמַצּ֥וֹת אָפָ֖ה וַיֹּאכֵֽלוּ** **And he made a party for them and baked Matzos and they ate (19:3) – Rashi** explains that they ate because it was Pesach. Yet, how could they eat Matzos if the reason we eat Matzos had not applied as yet? The **Beis HaLevi** (Bo) explains that contrary to man’s understanding that the Mitzvos effect a reminder of the events, the events actually give rise to the Mitzvos that preceded them. As **Rav Gifter ztl.** explained, the events happened because of the Mitzvos. For this reason we do not make a Sh’asa Nissim on the Seder since it is a biblical obligation. For Biblical Mitzvos, the Mitzva was there long before the story that backs it up.

**וַיִּתְמַהְמָ֓הּ**  **And he delayed (19:16) – Rav Chaim Kanievsky Shlita** notes that the Trop here is a Shalsheles  and that there are 3 other times that this note appears in the Torah. In all 4 cases the Trop denotes an extension of the issue. Here, Lot delayed longer than necessary, Eliezer davened longer than necessary and Rivka was already on her way, Yosef refused strongly to close the door on the advances of the wife of Potiphar and the Shechita at the time of the Hakamas Hamishkan was more extensive than that of the Chatas and Asham because Moshe wanted to get enough Dam for the sprinkling that needed to be done.

**וַיִּתְמַהְמָ֓הּ**  **And he delayed (19:16)** – The **Targum**points out that he delayed. The Trup choice of a Shalsheles also indicates that there was delay on the part of Lot. **Rav Nosson Tzvi Wachtfogel ztl.** points out that one of the lessons for success of Avraham and failure on the part of Lot is hidden here. Avraham moved without delay. Lot took breaks. Thus, although he learned in Avraham’s home, he did not embody the message. Hence, although he did engage in Mesiras Nefesh for Chessed, he did not run to do it. Hence, he could never be just like Avraham.

**וְאָֽנֹכִ֗י לֹ֤א אוּכַל֙ לְהִמָּלֵ֣ט הָהָ֔רָה I cannot go run to the mountain (19:19)** - The Midrash comments that Lot was afraid that if he went back to Avraham, his merits would not match up to Avraham’s and he would not be able to be in Avraham’s presence. Why was he not worried about this prior to the split between them? **Rav Elya Svei ztl.** learns that when someone is attached to a holy group, s/he is part of the group and does not need to match up for in essence, the individual is a part of the group. It is only when one splits FROM the group and makes himself independent and sees the error in the decision to split that the person has to acknowledge the error and attempt to rejoin the group. Lot was afraid that he had rejected Avraham and his merits would not be enough to get him back into the group. It is critical to remember that one is better off being a tail of a lion because a tail of a lion is still a lion than to split off and be something else.

**וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֥ם אַבְרָהָ֖ם בַּבֹּ֑קֶר אֶ֨ל־הַמָּק֔וֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָ֥מַד שָׁ֖ם  Avraham arose early to the place where he stood and greeted Hashem (19:27)** – It seems strange that at the moment when we are speaking about Lot’s plight and his flight from Sodom, we interrupt the story to tell us about where Avraham was. Why was this relevant? **Rav Tanchum Cohen Shlita** relayed in the name of **Rav Schachter Shlita** that the Torah is highlighting something important to us: While the daughters of Lot believed that they and their father were the last people on earth (hence the rest of the story), the Torah wants us to know the real truth – that they were only saved in the merit of Avraham, who went out to try to save even MORE people in the place he had debated Hashem. Similarly, their progeny would be fearful of Am Yisrael in the future and would try to curse us but that too was a mistake – because they also had nothing to fear --- Hashem had told us not to attack Ammon and Moav. It too, was not their Zechus but rather in the cards of Hashem that declared what the ultimate plan was supposed to be.

**וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֥ם אַבְרָהָ֖ם בַּבֹּ֑קֶר אֶ֨ל־הַמָּק֔וֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָ֥מַד שָׁ֖ם  And Avraham got up early and went to the place where he had previously stood before Hashem (19:27)**– Chazal teach us the importance of having a set place for davening (Berachos 6b). Yet why is this so critical? **Rav Dov Weinberger ztl (Shemen HaTov vol. 4)** explained that it is similar to the challenge of “Mi Yaaleh B’Har Hashem U’Mi Yakum b’Mikom Kodsho” – that it is easier to rise to a lofty place in life but it is tough to make sure that one maintains the level s/he ascends. That was the greatness of Avraham. Even though Sodom sat smoldering in front of him – testimony that his attempt to save the city failed - he still did not give up on Hashem. We all have the tough days. We need to remember consistency even – or perhaps ESPECIALLY – in those times.

**וּשְׁתֵּ֤י בְנֹתָיו֙ The daughters of Lot (19:31)**– They thought that they were doing a Mitzva. Still, **Rashi**tells us that the episode caused embarrassment to Avraham. What did they miss? **Rav Schachter Shlita** explained to us that we cannot know in whose Zechus a safety mechanism happens. One who is smaller does not see the whole picture. That is what happened here too. They felt that it was their Zechus that saved them. But it was not. We need to avoid the Messiah complex and not cut corners – it can lead to disaster.

**וּשְׁתֵּ֤י בְנֹתָיו֙ The story of the daughters of Lot** (19:31) --  The Midrash notes that Hashem said that he found Dovid HaMelech in Sodom. **Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht ztl**. used to explain that the success of a Melech is his ability to understand and lead his people. If he and his lineage is too perfect, he will not understand the people and will be unable to lead and appropriately govern them.

**וַתַּשְׁקֶ֧יןָ אֶת־אֲבִיהֶ֛ן יַ֖יִן בַּלַּ֣יְלָה ה֑וּא So they plied their father with wine on that night (19:33)** - The term “that night” is peculiar. It should normally be “Balaila HaHu” not “Balailah Hu”. **Rav Dovid Feinstein ztl.** explained that Hu refers to an intentional action by Hashem**. Rashi** explains that Lot’s family didn’t have time to take wine with them into the cave. But Hashem provided them with the wine since he believed in the mission and the future of the daughters’ of Lot to be pure. However, He also brought it about with indignity for Lot to punish him for the lifestyle he had embraced in Sodom.

**ותהרנה שתי בנות לוטAnd the 2 daughters of Lot became pregnant from their father (19:36)** – How did the same action of Znus that  showed a lack of care for Gilui Arayos in that it was revealed (the older called her son Moav proudly) lead to the seed of Moshiach? **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** is reported to have said (see intro to Iggros Moshe volume 8) that the Bnos Lot insisted that they did not want to be accused of raising children through immaculate conception – hence they called the child Moav**.  Rav Goldvicht ztl.** pointed out that this was precisely why the Midrash explains that the Midrashic evolution of the Davidic line is in Sodom. Hashem wanted the permanent Davidic line to represent the people with a Kupah Shel Sheratzim around his neck in order to understand them and represent them.

**וַתֵּ֤לֶד הַבְּכִירָה֙ בֵּ֔ן The older daughter had a child whom she called Moav (19:37)** – Moshiach comes from Moav which means he comes from a sin situation. Peretz too, comes from Tamar which was a questionable origin.  **Rav Mordechai Gifter ztl.** explained that this is not haphazard. Rather, Moshiach’s job is to fix the world and make it available to Malchus Hashem. Being able to recognize that mission because it is in his own blood makes his calling more complete (This idea was often expressed by Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht ztl. too).

**וְהִ֖וא בְּעֻ֥לַת בָּֽעַל: She is the wife of a husband (20:3)** – Actually the term Beuls Baal is a term of connection of a sexual nature. **Rav Schachter Shlita** highlighted that in the secular society the marital connection is all based on physical issues. We look to our marriages as more than chance encounters of physical attraction and we require tighter and more lasting bonds in our marriages – hence we call them Kiddushin with Kessef and Shtar etc.

**צְחֹ֕ק עָ֥שָׂה לִ֖י אֱלֹק֑ים Hashem made it a laughter (20:6)** - How are we to understand the difficulty that our Avos and Imahos had in having children? Why did Avraham and Sarah need to live without one for so many years, only to go through the Yishmael experiences**? Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ztl.** explained that while there are many answers, one transcends all others. Namely, that we are meant to understand that “*We cherish what we wait for and what we most risk losing.”* Life is full of wonders. The birth of a child is a miracle. Yet, precisely because these things are natural, we take them for granted, forgetting that nature has an architect, and history an author. *Judaism is a sustained discipline in not taking life for granted.* We were the people born in slavery so that we would value freedom. We were the nation always small, so that we would know that strength does not lie in numbers but in the faith that begets courage. Our ancestors walked through the valley of the shadow of death, so that we could never forget the sanctity of life. That is why, Hashem put Abraham and Sarah through these trials – the long wait, the unmet hope, the Akaida – so that neither they nor their descendants would ever take children for granted. Every child is a miracle. Being a parent is the closest we get to God – bringing life into being through an act of love.

**מֶה־עָשִׂ֤יתָ לָּ֨נוּ֙ וּמֶה־חָטָ֣אתִי לָ֔ךְ כִּֽי־הֵבֵ֧אתָ עָלַ֛י וְעַל־מַמְלַכְתִּ֖י חֲטָאָ֣ה גְדֹלָ֑ה  What were you thinking that led you to do this thing (20:9)** – Avimelech accuses Avraham of attempting to entrap him. Yet to this ridiculous charge Avraham says nothing. Later, he speaks up**. Rav Nissan Alpert ztl**. notes that to the first charge of Avraham actually plotting something – he chooses silence as the charges are so removed from reality. He DOES choose to correct Avimelech when the mornarch tries to absolve himself by noting that Avraham DID something. To this Avraham responds that he didn’t DO anything. He merely spoke and stated the truth. The ones responsible for the DOING were the Philistines and their king.

**וַיְהִ֞י כַּֽאֲשֶׁ֧ר הִתְע֣וּ אֹתִ֗י  And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house (20:13) – Rashi**comments that **Onkelos “**writes as he does.” A glance at Onkelos lets us know that Avraham meant that when the nations of the world were mistaken and followed their own handiwork Hashem brought me close to Him. What does Rashi add with his comment? **Rav Meir Shapiro ztl.** explains that Onkelos deviated from his usual stress on the simple meaning of the words. Why? Because he was writing as he practiced. He too, was saved from the life of the Roman government. He saw the light and converted. Thus, he fulfilled that which he chose to use as his translation.

**צְחֹ֕ק עָ֥שָׂה לִ֖י Hashem made me a laughter, whomever shall hear shall laugh with me (21:6)  - Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev** explains that the reason Hashem gave children to Avraham and Sarah in their old age was in order to make the effort greater. For there is no comparison between the joy of one who completes a hard fought goal and the same for someone who got it easily. This is why the name “Elokim” is used here instead of the one of Rachamim. It is also the hint in the Possuk of Odeicha --- when I undergo a challenge at the beginning I thank you for MeEis Hashem Hayeisa Zos – I recognize it is Hashem’s doing. It is harder to appreciate something that comes naturally.

**ויִגְדַּ֥ל הַיֶּ֖לֶד וַיִּגָּמַ֑ל And the child grew up and he was weaned (21:8**) – **Rashi** cites the Midrash which notes that when Avraham made the party, he invited the Gedolei HaDor Avimelech and Ever to join him. When was the party held? There is debate among the Rishonim as to this point. Rashi notes that it was at 24 months. The Midrash says it was at the Bar Mitzvah and Daas Zekanim says that it was at his bris. **Rav Mordechai Eliyahu ztl.** explains the Simcha at each of these stages. He notes that according to the Baalei HaTosafos the simcha was the Simcha Shel Mitzva of performing the Bris. But according to Rashi that it was at the end of 24 months, what Mitzva was celebrated then? Rav Eliyahu ztl. explains that when Sarah had the baby Yitzchak, it was only SHE who was capable of nursing all of the other children including her own. In celebration of the Nes and in appreciation of the completion of the Chessed, Avraham had a party to thank Hashem. The third opinion – that of Bar Mitzva understands that the completion of the stages of growth are achieved, not when the person is done with nursing or Milah but when one is done with the chinuch process and the punishments are no longer the father’s. Hence the party at the bar Mitzva—in celebration of the completion of the work of Avraham.

**וַיַּ֤עַשׂ אַבְרָהָם֙ מִשְׁתֶּ֣ה גָד֔וֹל  Avraham made a big party (21:8) – Rashi**explains that the party was big because of the Gedolei HaDor – Shem, Eiver and Avimelech – who were there. **Rav Yerucham Levovitz ztl.** pointed out that what we call a big party today is based on numbers or on publicity. In the Torah, what makes a major party is the major personalities who attend. We see how we can check in on whether our perceptions check out with those of the Torah from little examples like this.

**גָּרֵ֛שׁ הָֽאָמָ֥ה הַזֹּ֖את וְאֶת־בְּנָ֑הּ** **Get rid of this maidservant and her child (21:9-12)** -  **Rav Aharon Kotler ztl.** notes that the difference of opinion here between Avraham and Sarah was deep indeed – but surrounded matters of education. Sarah saw that although Yishmael was on a high Madreiga, he was a threat to the religious level of her child. She therefore felt that he needed to be removed from Yitzchak’s presence lest Yishmael permanently ruin Yitzchak. Avraham disagreed. He felt that bringing Yishmael as far up as he could was critical for Yishmael and the proper course for him in life. Rav Aharon adds that even with this explanation – it is still a drop in the bucket of the proper way one is supposed to look at the Avos and Imahos.

**אַל־יֵרַ֤ע בְּעֵינֶ֨יךָ֙ עַל־הַנַּ֣עַר Do not be upset about the lad (21:12)** – Yishmael is referred to as a Naar which Onkelos explains means the youth. In the rest of the Parsha he translates the word Naar as “Child”. Why the change? **Rav Yakov Kamenetzky ztl.** explained that the difference is a bit of insight into the disagreement between Avraham and Sarah. Avraham maintained that he was Umah like the nations of the world and Yirusha should follow the father. Sarah noted that Avraham was Am Yisrael and status is determined by the mother and Yishmael followed his mother. Hashem sided with Sarah – not for monetary Yirusha necessarily as much as for status as Klal Yisrael. Hashem has repeatedly highlighted this status – the malach told Hagar she should name the child – hence the naar here must mean youth but not your child. Yishmael was Hagar’s.

**וַתֵּ֣לֶךְ וַתֵּ֔תַע בְּמִדְבַּ֖ר בְּאֵ֥ר שָֽׁבַע She went and wandered (21:14) - Rashi** explains that she intended to return to her Avoda Zara. **Sifsei Chachamim** asks how Rashi learned this idea? **Rav Mordechai Pograminsky ztl** answers that a Jew is never lost. S/he always knows that Hashem is with him/her. Thus, if the Torah tells us that Hagar was lost, she must have left Hashem. **Rav Avigdor Miller ztl** added that someone who is so attached to this world and thinks that everything important is here, is also lost in his path of life and needs a reality check.

**וַתַּשְׁלֵ֣ךְ אֶת־הַיֶּ֔לֶד תַּ֖חַת אַחַ֥ד הַשִּׂיחִֽם: And she cast off the child under one of the thornbushes. And she went and sat opposite him (21:15-16)** – The movements of Hagar are most interesting as they are intriguing. Did she want to leave? How could she? After all, she IS a mother? Why did she cast the child if she was going to sit by and watch? **Rav Binyomin Eisenberger Shlita** explains that the practices of Hagar were a lesson in Tefillah. She cast the child refers to the comment made by the **Chozeh of Lublin** who explains that when we are in peril we need to cast our lot on Hashem. Thus she put him Tachas Achat HaSichin – in the context of one of the conversations with Hashem, but in order to effectively daven she needed the distance in order to attain some degree of Kavana in the mission she had without going to check on him constantly in the middle. The same can be said of our power of prayer. We too, need to remove impediments to our connecting to Hashem in Tefillah when we daven.

**וַיִּשְׁמַ֣ע אֱלֹקים֘ אֶת־ק֣וֹל הַנַּ֒עַר֒ Hashem heard the voice of the lad (21:17) - Rashi** tells us that we learn the lesson that Hashem listens to the prayers of the sick first. **Rav Wolbe ztl.** explained that this is because the sick prays from the depths of his heart and understands that everything is from Hashem.

**בַּֽאֲשֶׁ֥ר הוּא־שָֽׁם**:**Where he was (21:17) – Rashi** comments that the Malachim wanted Hashem to destroy Yishmael now but Hashem told them that at present he was a Tzaddik and deserved to be saved. **Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi** famously asks why Yishmael was different than the Ben Sorer U’Moreh who is judged based upon his future? **The Maharsha (Rosh Hashana 16b)** explains that the Ben Sorer U’Moreh’s future is his own. Yishmael’s progeny are the ones who will destroy the Jews  -- not he. The **Sfas Emes** answers that it could be that the evil planned in the future by the present Ben Sorer uMoreh can be stopped if he does not make it to the future while it is possible that Yishmael could already have impregnated a future offspring.

**בַּֽאֲשֶׁ֥ר הוּא־שָֽׁם:I heard the voice of the Naar where he is (21:17)** – The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 16b) notes that a person is only judged based on where he is – not what he will be. But what do we say about the Ben Sorer U’Moreh who is judged based on what will ultimately happen to him? **Rav Yerucham Levovitz ztl.** explained that when we already see within the person the same Sibah for further damage– we can act now. (Think Moshe and the Mitzree) But merely seeing seeing destruction in the future generations does not give us the right to kill someone now (Think Chizkiyahu’s potential death).

**וַיִּפְקַ֤ח He opened her eyes (21:19) -** The Midrash cites Rav Binyamin who notes that we are all blind until Hashem opens our eyes. **Rav Dessler ztl** adds that a person needs to be careful every day of his life to make sure that s/he is heading on the right path instead of fumbling around in the darkness.

**וּפִיכֹל֙ שַׂר־צְבָא֔וֹ Pichol (21:22)** – It is interesting that Avimelech never seems to speak without Pichol present, why? **Rav Berel Wein Shlita** suggested that Pichol represented the muscle behind the Avimelech diplomacy. Avraham realized that this was the stacked deck in the deal and realized that he had no choice but to accept the terms. However, we too, have a “muscle” – Hashem. And our faith in Him is what will make us victorious in the end.

**לֹ֣א יָדַ֔עְתִּי מִ֥י עָשָׂ֖ה אֶת־הַדָּבָ֣ר הַזֶּ֑ה** **The Philistines (21:26) – Rabbi Hayyim Angel Shlita** notes that the characterization of the Plishtim is in sharp contrast to that of Yishmael. Although warlike the latter eventually makes a piece with Yitzchak and the Jewish nation while the Philistines walk the line of being on the brink of war and plundering the Jewish nation at every turn.

ו**ַיְהִ֗י** **Akaidas Yitzchak (22:1)** – It killed Sarah but Avraham grew from the experience. How could that be? **Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz ztl (Chochmas Chaim)** explains that Avraham was warned up to the experience. Hashem gave him a chance to handle the shock by introducing the Akaida – Bincha, Yichidcha etc. Sarah just got the news quickly and the shock killed her. He adds that Avairos work the same way – if faced with the gravity of the sin, we would be so shocked and know not to do it. However, when we approach Avairos bit by bit, we come to run the risk of violating them.

**וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֵלָ֔יו אַבְרָהָ֖ם וַיֹּ֥אמֶר הִנֵּֽנִי** **And he said “Avraham” and he answered “Here I am” (22:1)**– For the commandment of the Akaida we find Hashem calling Avraham by name. Why this time?  **Rav Kook ztl**. explains that by calling a person by his name, Hashem is really calling the totality of the person on a deeper level and the person needs to be present and accounted for. **Rav Sabato Shlita** adds that by answering Heneni, the person is answering that s/he is present to answer and fulfill the will of Hashem in all cases and at all times.

**אֲשֶׁר־אָהַ֨בְתָּ֙ אֶת־יִצְחָ֔ק The one you love, Yitzchak (22:2)** – Rashi notes that Avraham reminded Hashem that he loved BOTH of his children. The trouble is, how much love could Avraham have, if he chased Yishmael out of his home? **Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel ztl, Der Alter of Slobodka** notes that Yishmael gained a tremendous amount from the distancing from Avraham. It led to the point where they were able to reunite together. Sometimes, the proper understand of love is knowing when to place distance. At the same time, Rabbi JJ Schacter would often note that while Avraham might have separated from Yishmael, the Midrash notes that he continued to check in and visit him in order to make sure he was ok.

**וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֨ם אַבְרָהָ֜ם בַּבֹּ֗קֶר** **Avraham got up early in the morning (22:3)** – So he got up early but the trip took 3 days? What took so long? The midrash describes Avraham’s challenges at the Akaida and how the Satan tried to stop Avraham from going each step of the way. Why did Avraham ignore him and not the Malach of the Akaida who successfully stopped Avraham from slaughtering Yitzchak? **Rav Meir Shapiro ztl,** Lubliner Rav explained that when Avraham saw the Ayil in the thicket he knew the Malach was correct. The Ayil represented life – and life is filled with challenges but the challenges make us stronger. When the Malach showed this to him, Avraham understood that this was truth and that it was part of a bigger test.

**וַיִּקַּ֞ח אֶת־שְׁנֵ֤י נְעָרָיו֙ אִתּ֔וֹ**  **And he took his two lads with him and his son Yitzchak (22:3)** – Why does the Torah mention the lads first and Yitzchak afterwards? The **Sefer Ksav V’Hakabbala** explains that Avraham didn’t take Yitzchak first lest the others figure out that they were merely ancillary to the trip. **Rav Shteinman ztl** adds that they were a necessary component to the departure in that one cannot go on the road without two escorts.

**וַיִּשָּׂ֨א אַבְרָהָ֧ם אֶת־עֵינָ֛יו וַיַּ֥רְא אֶת־הַמָּק֖וֹם מֵֽרָחֹֽק:** **He lifted his eyes and  saw the place from afar (22:4)**– What was Avraham looking for? What did he see? The Ksav V’Hakabbala explains that he sought the right opportunity to fulfill the word of Hashem. On the 3rdday he saw a sign – it was a cloud on the mountain (suggests Rashi). **Rav Chaim Sabato Shlita** explains that the mountain symbolizes the physical while a cloud symbolizes the spiritual. On the third day, Avraham saw the 2 combine. That is why the mountain is called Makom – Har denotes the merely physical topography. Place denotes that the location is a rendezvous point with Hashem. At that point only those who could “See” the potential would be permitted to connect to it. Everyone else, got left with the donkey.

**שְׁבֽוּ־לָכֶ֥ם פֹּה֙ עִם־הַֽחֲמ֔וֹר וַֽאֲנִ֣י וְהַנַּ֔עַר נֵֽלְכָ֖ה עַד־כֹּ֑ה You stay here with the donkey (22:5)** - **Rav Schachter Shlita** was fond of noting the comments of **Rav Soloveitchik ztl**. that there is a difference between Poh and Koh. Poh is what the nations of the world like to live in -- the here and now without hope for destiny. Koh speaks to a place that is beyond.

**אַל־תִּשְׁלַ֤ח יָֽדְךָ֙ אֶל־הַנַּ֔עַר וְאַל־תַּ֥עַשׂ ל֖וֹ מְא֑וּמָה Do not send your hand forth (22:12)** - **Rav Simcha Bunim of Pesischa ztl** notes that if we blow a shofar on Rosh Hashana to remember the Akaida, shouldn’t it be more proper to hold up a knife in order to remind Hashem that Avraham was ready to sacrifice his son? Why the Shofar and not the knife? **Rav Yisrael Meir Lau Shlita** explained that the blowing of the ram’s horn recalls the words of the Almighty, "Do not harm the lad, and do not do a thing to him." We "remind" the Almighty that, in the end, He was opposed to human sacrifices; we too, today, anticipate the fulfillment of the eternal promise, "Do not harm the lad." We too, at this time, say, "Enough!" to the evil adversary of death - we pray and request of the Almighty that the sacrifices cease and that we merit a speedy and complete redemption.

**כִּ֣י | עַתָּ֣ה יָדַ֗עְתִּי I now know that you are one who fears Hashem (22:12)** – It sounds like the Akaida taught us that Avraham served Hashem M’Yirah. Yet, it sounds like Avraham’s primary means of serving Hashem was through love? The **Steipler ztl.** explains that the Yirah described here is the Yirah of Romeimus (awe) which includes love too and both are achieved today through the study of Torah – both the written and the oral. Specifically, the Steipler encourages the study of Aggados because he who studies the aggados will have Yiras Cheit while those who do not, will not.

**כְּכֽוֹכְבֵ֣י הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וְכַח֕וֹל אֲשֶׁ֖ר עַל־שְׂפַ֣ת הַיָּ֑ם I will make your children like the stars of the Shomayim and the sand on the shore (22:17)** – The **Midrash** suggests that the Beracha of the stars was given to Avraham and the sand to Yitzchak. Why the difference? There is a major difference between stars and sand. Stars illuminate individually, sharing their significance outwardly. Sand sticks together and impacts best, making its impression when it does, in concert with the other sand. Until there was a Yitzchak, Avraham could only make his impact outwardly. He was, after all, the only Jew. Once Yitzchak was born, the Beracha of sticking together was a possibility and would make impact not only externally but within the nation too.

**וְהַרְבָּ֨ה אַרְבֶּ֤ה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ֙ כְּכֽוֹכְבֵ֣י הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וְכַח֕וֹל אֲשֶׁ֖ר עַל־שְׂפַ֣ת הַיָּ֑ם** **And I will increase your children like the sand and the stars (22:17) – Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** notes that there are three distinct Berachos here: like the sand at the shore which withstands the roar of the sea – so too, a Jew faces adversity and overcomes it. The dust of the earth which refers to that which provides sustenance to the entire world and the stars which no matter how big the world gets, the stars are above it. In that regard, the Jew will be the same.

**וַיָּקֻ֛מוּ וַיֵּֽלְכ֥וּ יַחְדָּ֖ו אֶל־בְּאֵ֣ר שָׁ֑בַע They arose and they went together to Be’er Sheva (22:19)** – In the two earlier instance of the phrase Vayeilchu Shneihem Yachdav (that they went together) we learn valuable lessons about how Avraham went with an unsuspecting Yitzchak and went with the same heart and how Yitzchak figured out the purpose and still walked with the same heart as Avraham. What is the lesson of the third one mentioned here? **Rav Mendel Futerfas ztl.** explained that when Avraham went back to Beer Sheva with Yishmael and Eliezer, he carried no overt smugness that he was able to withstand the test that was the Akaida.

***Haftara:***

**Rav Schachter Shlita** noted that the connection between the Haftara and the Parasha is two-fold. The first is in the fact that both the Shunamis and Avraham and Sarah were answered with Zara Shel Kayama. But there is a deeper level of connection for communities beyond the Frankfurt and Sefardi communities who read more. The wife of Ovadiah and the Shunamis witness miracles but from behind closed doors. Similarly despite being told of Sarah’s having a baby in Parashas Lech Lecha, Avraham does not reveal this to anyone — not even Sarah. Both the Parasha and the Haftara highlight the idea that Kavod Hashem Hester Davar.

**Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl Shlita** explained that the Haftorah’s story of a woman who could not have children who was blessed with one only to lose him until a second miracle was needed is odd. Unless one realizes that when a child is born, especially as a result of a miracle, then his raison d’etra needs to be for Hashem’s will. This child was born but, as the Novi notes, he went to work in the fields. This was not the ideal for which he was brought into the world. Once his life was restored, he was returned to loftier work in life and the Zohar identifies him as the Jewish Novi Habakuk.

**וְאִשָּׁ֣ה אַחַ֣ת מִנְּשֵׁ֣י בְנֵֽי־הַ֠נְּבִיאִים And a woman from the Bnei HaNeviim (Melachim II: 4:1) – Rav Yaakov Kamenetzsky ztl.**wondered why these stories in the Haftorah – both of which impact a single family as opposed to the nation as a whole—are included in the Novi at all. After all, only prophesies for the future are supposed to be recorded (see Megillah 14a)—why are these here? Rav Yaakov answered that we learn a valuable lesson here – that a Novi may use supernatural means when necessary in the battle for faith. This does not mean that faith springs from the miracle – quite to the contrary. Faith comes from the Masores. But sometimes, people need the ability to see a sign to return to the Masores based faith. That is the reason these stories are here – to inspire those for whom supernatural faith stories restore faith. In an additional answer, Rav Yaakov comments that that these Nevuos will be necessary in the future when Eliyahu comes to tell us about the Geulah and there will be challenges to the Nevuah. These type of miracles (performed by Eliyahu and later by Elisha with double Eliyahu’s power) will testify to the veracity of his Nevuah.

**וְאִשָּׁ֣ה אַחַ֣ת מִנְּשֵׁ֣י בְנֵֽי־הַ֠נְּבִיאִים** **The wife of the Bnei HaNeviim** – We read a very long Haftorah which seems to describe 2 disparate stories with Elisha. Why is it necessary to tell the first story of the miracle with the oil? Why is that part of the Haftorah. **Rabbi Avrohom Gordimer Shlita** suggested that the connection to the Parsha is quite apparent: If we examine things carefully, we notice that every nes (miracle) in Parshas Vayeira was totally unanticipated. Sarah disbelieved that she would give birth (18:12), Hagar moved far away from the mortally-ill Yishmael “for I cannot watch him die” (21:16), Avrohom was stunned that Yitzchak really did not need to be slaughtered (Rashi on 22:13, from Tanchuma). What is noteworthy is not the mere fact that the beneficiaries of these supernatural occurrences did not expect them; the humility of the people upon whom these miracles were bestowed, such that there was a total absence of their feeling entitled to special treatment, is what is important.Following in Hashem’s ways means just that – that one does what Hashem wants and does not feel entitled to anything. Once Ovadia’s widow experienced the miracle of the increase in oil, one would expect that she would have immediately gone and sold the oil, understanding that its volume increased supernaturally for her benefit. Instead, what was her reaction? “And she told the man of God (about the oil increasing), and he said, ‘Go sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your children will live off the remaining proceeds.’” Ovadia’s widow made no presumptions and had no expectations of entitlement; she only wanted to do what God directed and knew that she was in His hands.

**מַה־יֶּשׁ־לָ֖ךְ (כתיב לָ֖כְי)**  **What do you have in the house? “(Melachim II:4:2)** – The word for you (Lach) is spelled as “Lachi.” Why? **The Rif commentary cited in the Abarbanel**explains that the woman was the wife of Ovadiah who used to borrow money with interest in order to feed the Bnei HaNeviim. As noble as his charity act was, Hashem cannot bring beracha on a utensil that was used to do an Avaira – like borrowing with interest. Beracha can only fall on something that was legitimately hers (and not her husband’s.) There are many who think they will see Beracha from stolen monies. The ends never justify the means.

**אֵ֣ין לְשִׁפְחָתְךָ֥ כֹל֙ בַּבַּ֔יִת כִּ֖י אִם־אָס֥וּךְ שָֽׁמֶן I have nothing but a drop of oil (Melachim Beis 4:2)** – **Rav Yitzchak Schneerson ztl, Alter Rebbe of Lubavitch**, retold the story of this miracle allegorically. According to the Rebbe, the woman is a metaphor for the Jewish soul, the creditor is the animalistic pat of the soul which wants to overtake the entire human. But the person is not willing to give up totally, it just feels that it has been too worn down. The Novi remains the soul to look for anything it has to hold on to. And the soul finds a bit of oil – a pintele yid that can be used to fill many jugs – Torah and Mitzvos that can sustain it for a lifetime.

**וּבָ֗את וְסָגַ֚רְתְּ הַדֶּ֙לֶת֙ בַּעֲדֵ֣ךְ וּבְעַד־בָּנַ֔יִךְ  And you should go and close the door for yourself and your children** (Melachim II 4:4) – From **Rashi**it is apparent that the goal of this miracle was not in the publicity as much as in the message that Hashem saves. Hence, the door was to be closed during the miracle. Why then was the wife of Ovadiah permitted to have her children present? **Rav Yitzchok Lichtenstein Shlita**suggests that while there is an issue of Hester Davar in terms of the public in miracles like these, the opposite message is there for the children. Children are to know who their parents are, and what Zechusim they have in order for them to appreciate where they come from and their own relationship with the Ribbono Shel Olam. If Hashem was going to bring about a Yeshua for them via their parents, He wanted the children to know about it, about them and to grow.

**הִנֵּה־נָ֣א יָדַ֔עְתִּי  I know that the Ish Elokim is a holy man (Melachim II:4:9) – Rashi** explains that she saw that there was never a fly on his table. Why is that a sign? **Rav Nosson Gestetner ztl.** explains that the Yetzer HaRa is like a fly – always interfering with a person and his life. To the Tzaddik, the flies do not interfere with his ability to remain focused on his mission of following Hashem’s plan for him in life.