

וירא

Vayera

Genesis 18:1-22:24
Haftarah II Kings 4:1-37
Shabbat, October 31, 2026
כ׳ בְּחֶשְׁוָן תשפ״ז

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Vayera opens with Avraham sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day, where he runs to welcome three visitors and serves them a generous meal. From there the portion moves through the announcement of Sarah's son, the destruction of Sodom with Lot's escape and his wife's fate, the birth of Yitzchak, the sending away of Hagar and Yishmael, the covenant at Beer-sheba, and the binding of Yitzchak on the mountain in Moriah. The haftarah, from Melachim II, offers two stories of wonder: a widow's jar of oil that fills every vessel she can borrow, and a Shunammite woman's son who is restored to life through Elisha.

The midrashic and commentary sections then take up questions the text leaves open. The midrash considers rebuke as a form of love and peace, the name Jerusalem as a joining of Avraham's "Yireh" and Shem's "Shalem," and the inner experience of Yitzchak on the altar. Classical commentators debate whether the trial was a reward or a correction, whether the visitors were seen in waking life or in a dream, and why Yishmael mocked and what Sarah was reacting to. The Chassidic and modern sections turn toward the inner life, exploring Avraham's humility, the struggle with the yetzer hara, the meaning of Avraham's separation before the Akeidah, and the ambivalence that held Lot in Sodom.



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THE READING · GENESIS 18:1–14

ראשון
First Aliyah

God appears to Avraham by the terebinths of Mamre as he sits at his tent entrance in the heat. He sees three men standing near him, runs to greet them, and hurries to offer water, rest under the tree, and a meal of bread, cakes, a calf, curds, and milk, which he serves as they eat; they then promise that Sarah will have a son at this season next year, Sarah laughs to herself at the idea of bearing a child in her old age, and God asks Avraham why Sarah laughed and affirms that nothing is too wondrous for God. AI SUMMARY

[1] The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.

א וַיֵּרָ֤א אֵלָיו֙ יְהוָ֔ה בְּאֵלֹנֵ֖י מַמְרֵ֑א וְה֣וּא יֹשֵׁ֔ב
פֶּ֖תַח־הָאֹ֑הֶל כְּחֹ֖ם הַיּֽוֹם׃

RAMBAN & RASHBAM P. 52 A vision could confirm, not command, a righteous deed

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[1] Not long after Abraham's circumcision, **the Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and** this occurred when **he,** Abraham, **sat at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.**

SELECTED RASHI

18:1 AND THE LORD APPEARED UNTO HIM to visit the sick man. R. Hama the son of Hanina said: it was the third day after his circumcision and the Holy One, blessed be He, came and enquired after the state of his health (Bava Metzia 86b)

18:1 BY THE TEREBINTHS OF MAMRÉ — It was he (Mamre) who advised him (Abraham) regarding the circumcision and therefore He revealed himself to him in his (Mamre's) territory (Genesis Rabbah 42:8).

18:1 literally, יֹשֵׁב WAS SITTING — The word is written ישב (without the ו) and therefore may be translated "he sat": He wished to rise, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, Sit and I will stand. You shall form an example to your descendants — that I, in time to come, will stand in the assembly of the judges while they will sit, as it is said, (Psalms 82:1) "God standeth in the assembly of the judges" (Genesis Rabbah 48:7)

18:1 AT THE TENT-DOOR — that he might see whether anyone passed by, and invite him into the house

18:1 IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY — The Holy One, blessed be He, brought the sun out of its sheath that he might not be troubled by travellers, and when He perceived that he was grieved that no travellers came He brought to him angels in the form of men (Bava Metzia 86b).

[2] Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground,

ב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים נִצָּבִים עָלָיו וַיַּרְא וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה׃

SFORNO & RADAK P. 57 Did Avraham see angels while awake or dreaming?

[3] he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant.

ג וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אַל־נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדֶּךָ׃

[4] Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree.

ד יֻקַּח־נָא מְעַט־מַיִם וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשָּׁעֲנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ׃

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[2] **He,** Abraham, **lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing before him.** He had not noticed the men approaching, and he was surprised to see them suddenly so near him. **He saw** them **and ran toward them from the entrance of the tent and prostrated himself to the earth.** He did not wait for them to reach the tent before greeting them; rather, he approached them warmly and ran to welcome them, thereby showing them great respect. [3] **He said: My Lord, please, if I have found favor in Your eyes,** if You wish, **please do not depart from upon your servant.** Most commentaries maintain that this statement was addressed to God, who had just revealed Himself to Abraham. As Abraham rushed toward the guests, he begged God to wait until he had properly welcomed them. [4] Abraham turned to the men and said: **Please, let a little water be taken, and wash your feet,** since you have come from afar, and you certainly need to rest. Washing one's feet, whether he wore shoes or not, was one of the first steps a traveler took to relax. **And recline beneath the tree,** in the shade.

SELECTED RASHI

18:2 AND BEHOLD THREE MEN — one to announce to Sarah the birth of a son, one to overthrow Sodom, and one to cure Abraham, for one angel does not carry out two commissions (Genesis Rabbah 50:2). You may know that this is so because throughout this section it (Scripture) mentions them in the plural — "and they ate" (Genesis 18:8), "and they said unto him" (Genesis 18:9) — whilst in the case of the announcement it states, (Genesis 18:10) "And he said, I will certainly return unto thee", and with regard to the overthrow of Sodom it says (Genesis 19:22) "For "I" cannot do anything" and (Genesis 19:21) "that "I" will not overthrow [the city]". Raphael who healed Abraham went thence to rescue Lot; that explains what is stated (Genesis 19:17) "And it came to pass when they had brought them forth, that he said, Escape for thy life", for you learn from this that only one of these acted as Deliverer

18:2 STOOD BY, or OVER HIM — before him; only this is a more fitting expression to use of angels

18:2 AND HE SAW — What does the repetition of this word וירא imply? The first time it has its ordinary meaning ("he looked"), the second that of understanding: he saw that they were standing in one spot, and so understood that they had no desire to cause him any trouble. Although they knew that he would go to meet them they nevertheless remained where they were out of respect to him and to show him that they wished to spare him trouble; he, therefore, took the initiative and ran towards them. In the Treatise Bava Metzia 86b we have the following: It is written, "they were standing by him" and it is also written "He ran towards them" — how can these apparently contradictory statements be reconciled? But the explanation is, that at first they stood by him and when they perceived that he was loosening and re-binding his bandages, they retired from him; he therefore immediately ran towards them.

18:3 AND HE SAID, MY LORD, IF NOW etc. — He addressed himself to the Chief of them; calling them all "lords", (אדני may mean "my lords"), whilst to their Chief he said "Do not I pray thee pass away", for he knew that if he would not pass by, his companions would certainly remain with him. In this explanation the word אדני has a "profane" sense (does not refer to God, being merely a term of address, "Sirs") . Another explanation is that the word is "holy" (referring to God): he asked God to wait for him whilst he ran and invited the travellers. For although this is written after the words "and he ran to meet them", yet the conversation took place beforehand. It, indeed, is the way of the Scriptures to speak in this manner as I have explained in my comment on "My spirit shall not strive" (Genesis 6:3) which is written after the passage. "And Noah begot" (Genesis 5:32) whereas it is impossible to say otherwise than that the decree of a respite of 120 years made in reference to this verse "My spirit shall not strive etc." was twenty years before the birth of Noah's sons.) Both these explanations of אדני are to be found in Genesis Rabbah 48:10 (see also Shevuot 35b).

18:4 AND WASH YOUR FEET — He thought they were Arabians who worship the dust of their feet, and he was particular not to have the object of idolatrous worship brought into his house (Bava Metzia 86b). Lot, however, who was not particular about this, mentioned "lodging" (i.e. entering the house) before "washing" the feet, as it is said (Genesis 19:2) "[And he said to the angels] tarry here all night and wash your feet."

ה וְאֶקְחָה פַת־לֶחֶם וְסַעֲדוּ לִבְּכֶם אַחַר תַּעֲבֹרוּ
כִּי־עַל־כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל־עַבְדְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן
תַּעֲשֶׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ׃

[5] And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "Do as you have said."

ו וַיְמַהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֹהֱלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר
מַהֲרִי שְׁלֹשׁ סְאִים קֶמַח סֹלֶת לוּשִׁי וַעֲשִׂי
עֻגוֹת׃

[6] Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!"

ז וְאֶל־הַבָּקָר רָץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בֶּן־בָּקָר רַךְ
וָטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַנַּעַר וַיְמַהֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ׃

[7] Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it.

ח וַיִּקַּח חֶמְאָה וְחָלָב וּבֶן־הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
וַיִּתֵּן לִפְנֵיהֶם וְהוּא־עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ
וַיֹּאכֵלוּ׃

[8] He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

ט וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אַיֵּה שָׂרָה אִשְׁתֶּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה
בָאֹהֶל׃

[9] They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he replied, "There, in the tent."

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[5] **I will take a portion of bread, and you shall sustain your heart,** meaning to satisfy your hunger, **thereafter depart.** I have no wish to delay you greatly; after you have rested and eaten a bit, feel free to go on your way. **As for this you have happened upon your servant.** Since you happened to arrive here, take the opportunity to stay with me. **They said** courteously: **Do so,** but only **as you have said.** Give us some bread and water and let us sit under the tree, as that will be enough for us. [6] Despite his guests' comment, Abraham acted otherwise, in his dedication and zeal. **Abraham hurried to the tent to Sarah and said: Hurry** and take **three se'a,** a significant amount, **of high-quality flour,** which is flour produced by the coarse grinding of wheat kernels, **knead** dough, **and make cakes,** a type of round bread. [7] **Abraham ran to the cattle and took a bullock, tender,** young, **and good, and gave it to the lad** standing there; he commanded the young man to slaughter the calf, skin it, and ready it for the meal. **And he,** the lad, **hurried to prepare it.** [8] **He took butter, milk, and the bullock that he prepared and placed it before them,** the visitors. In his delight at the opportunity to welcome guests, Abraham himself ran to provide for all their needs. Although his household presumably had bread stored away, he wanted fresh bread for his visitors. The baking of bread and the slaughter of cattle in honor of guests were also ceremonial acts that displayed the host's enthusiasm and goodwill. **He stood over them,** by serving them, **beneath the tree, and they ate.** [9] **They said to him: Where is Sarah, your wife?** Although these were ostensibly passersby, they could have known about Abraham. They may have asked about Sarah because it was customary for the mistress of the household to welcome important guests. **He said: Behold,** she is **in the tent.** She does not want to interfere with this ceremony.

SELECTED RASHI

18:8 AND THEY DID EAT—They appeared to be eating: from this we may learn that a man should not act differently from the prevalent custom (Bava Metzia 86b).

י וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוֹב אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וְהִנֵּה־בֵן לְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתֶּךָ וְשָׂרָה שֹׁמַעַת פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְהוּא אַחֲרָיו׃

10 Then one said, "I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him.

יא וְאַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה זְקֵנִים בָּאִים בַּיָּמִים חָדַל לִהְיוֹת לְשָׂרָה אֹרַח כַּנָּשִׁים׃

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women.

יב וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֵאמֹר אַחֲרֵי בְלֹתִי הָיְתָה־לִּי עֶדְנָה וַאדֹנִי זָקֵן׃

12 And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?"

יג וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָהָם לָמָּה זֶּה צָחֲקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר הַאַף אֱמְנָם אֵלֵד וַאֲנִי זָקַנְתִּי׃

13 Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?'

יד הֲיִפָּלֵא מֵיְהוָה דָּבָר לַמּוֹעֵד אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וּלְשָׂרָה בֵּן׃

14 Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

10 **He,** the leader of the guests, **said: I will return to you at this time next year, and behold, a son for Sarah, your wife. And Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent,** not far from the tree. **And he was behind it.** Apparently the man was standing behind the entrance of the tent, facing away, and consequently did not notice that Sarah was seeing and hearing everything. 11 **Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years.** Abraham was ninety-nine years old, while Sarah was ninety. **It had ceased to be with Sarah the manner of women,** meaning that she no longer experienced a menstrual cycle. 12 Therefore, when **Sarah,** who was alone, heard this, she **laughed inside herself** silently, **saying: After my languishing, shall I have youth?** Now that I am old and my menstrual cycle has ceased, shall my body become young again? This process is irreversible, **and** furthermore, **my lord** Abraham **is old.** 13 **The Lord said to Abraham.** The speaker was one of the visitors. At this point it became apparent that they were actually angels, messengers of God, who appeared in human form. Angels are sometimes referred to as: The Lord. Alternatively, this was the voice of God Himself, as Abraham was still before the Divine Presence when he tended to his guests. According to this interpretation, when God interrupted the conversation between Abraham and the visitors, He revealed that they were His messengers. **Why is it that Sarah laughed, saying: Shall I indeed bear a child, and I grew old?** Her laughter indicates a lack of faith in the prophecy. 14 **Is any matter beyond the** power of the **Lord? At the designated time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.** This will indeed occur, and then I will reveal Myself to you again.

SELECTED RASHI

18:12 [SARAH LAUGHED] WITHIN HERSELF (or, REGARDING HER INSIDE) — She reflected on her physical condition, saying, "Is it possible that this womb shall bear a child, that these dried-up breasts shall give forth milk" (Midrash Tanchuma, Shoftim 18).

18:13 I BEING OLD — Scripture (God) in relating her words to her husband alters them for the sake of peace, for she had said (v. 12) "my lord is old" (Genesis Rabbah 48:18).



THE READING · GENESIS 18:15–33

שני

Second Aliyah

Sarah denies laughing and is told, "You did laugh." The LORD says He will go down to see whether Sodom's outcry is true, and Avraham stands before Him and bargains from fifty righteous people down to ten, asking whether the city will be spared for their sake each time, until the LORD departs and Avraham returns to his place. AI SUMMARY

טו וַתְּכַחֵשׁ שָׂרָה | לֵאמֹר לֹא צָחַקְתִּי כִּי | יָרֵאָה
וַיֹּאמֶר | לֹא כִּי צָחָקְתְּ׃

15 Sarah lied, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was frightened. But He replied, “You did laugh.”

טז וַיָּקֻמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּשְׁקִפוּ עַל־פְּנֵי סְדֹם
וְאַבְרָהָם הֹלֵךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְּחָם׃

16 The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off.

יז וַיהוָה אָמָר הֲמְכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי
עֹשֶׂה׃

17 Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

יח וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוֹ יִהְיֶה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעָצוּם
וְנִבְרְכוּ־בוֹ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ׃

18 since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him?

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

15 **Sarah denied it, saying: I did not laugh.** Apparently Abraham, who had been standing close to the tent, came inside to speak with her. He reacted differently to the prophecy. Therefore, since God had told him that Sarah had laughed, he asked her why she had done so. Having laughed silently, Sarah denied that she had laughed, **for she was afraid** to admit to doubting the promise. Her denial demonstrates that she had indeed laughed out of ridicule, rather than joy. **He,** Abraham or God, **said: No, but you did laugh.** 16 The exchange between Abraham and Sarah occurred while the guests were eating. Afterward, **the men arose from there and looked** out from the hills **toward Sodom,** in the Jordan Valley far below. **And Abraham was walking with them to see them off,** as befitting a host. 17 **The Lord said** to Himself: **Shall I conceal from Abraham that which I am doing?** 18 He is dear to Me, **and Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation.** He will be a central figure in history, **and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.** They will all consider themselves his successors.

SELECTED RASHI

18:15 FOR SHE WAS AFRAID... BUT THOU DIDST LAUGH — The first כי is used in the sense of “because”, giving a reason for the former statement—Sarah denied ... because she was afraid; the second כי is used in the meaning of “but” — “and He said, ‘It is not as you say that you did not laugh, but thou didst laugh’.” For our Rabbis say (Rosh Hashanah 3a) that the word כי has four meanings: “if”, “perhaps”, “but”, “because”.

18:17 WHAT I AM DOING in Sodom. It is not proper for Me to do this thing without his knowledge. I gave him this land and these five cities therefore are his — as it is said, (10:19) “And the territory of the Canaanites was from Sidon ... as thou goest towards Sodom and Gommorah etc.” I called him Abraham, the father of a multitude of nations; should I destroy the children without informing the father who loves me? (Genesis Rabbah 49:2)

[19] For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him."

יט כִּי יְדַעְתִּיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יְצַוֶּה אֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־
בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה
וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הָבִיא יְהוָה עַל־אַבְרָהָם אֵת
אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עָלָיו׃

[20] Then the LORD said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave!

כ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה כִּי־רָבָּה
וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד׃

[21] I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note."

כא אֲרְדָה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי
עָשׂוּ | כָּלָה וְאִם־לֹא אֵדָעָה׃

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[19] **For I love him, so that he shall command his children and his household after him, and they will observe the way of the Lord, to perform righteousness and justice; so that the Lord will bring upon Abraham that which He spoke of him.** God's purpose would be realized through Abraham, as he was chosen to be the father of the nation that would receive numerous blessings and inherit the land of Canaan. Since Canaan was promised to Abraham's descendants, it was fitting that Abraham be informed of God's plans for the land. [20] **The Lord said: Because** I hear **the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah,** and it **is great** and increasing, **and because their sin,** evident from the cries of the oppressed individuals there, **is very heavy,** [21] **I will descend now and see if they have acted in accordance with the outcry that has reached Me.** The bare fact that certain people are suffering under the law does not necessarily mean that it is part of an evil regime. At times the suffering is due to problems of inefficiency, or insensitivity, rather than actual malfeasance. If the actions of Sodom are so evil that they justify the outcry, I will bring **destruction** upon them; **and if not, I will know** exactly what is happening there.

SELECTED RASHI

18:19 FOR I KNOW HIM — this is an expression denoting "affection", as (Ruth 2:1) "kinsman (מודע) of her husband," and (Ruth 3:2) "And is not Boaz our kinsman (מודעתנו), and (Exodus 30:17) "I have distinguished (ידעתיך) thee by name". Still the primary meaning of these terms connected with the root ידע is really that of knowing, for whoever holds a person in affection attaches him to himself, so that he knows him well and is familiar with him. And why do I hold him dear?

18:19 BECAUSE HE WILL GIVE HIS CHILDREN CHARGE CONCERNING ME TO KEEP MY WAYS. If, however, you explain it as the Targum, "I know "of" him that he will command his sons etc.", then the word למען does not fit into the sense.

18:19 IN ORDER THAT [THE LORD] MAY BRING — Thus will he ever command his children saying "Keep the way of the Lord in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham etc." Since it does not say here ''upon the house of Abraham", but upon Abraham himself, we may infer that he who trains up a righteous son is as though he never dies (Genesis Rabbah 49:4).

18:21 I WILL GO DOWN NOW — This teaches the judges that they should not give decisions in cases involving capital punishment, except after having carefully looked into the matter — all as I have explained in the section dealing with the dispersion of the nations (11:5). Another explanation of ארדה נא is: I will go down to the very end of their doings (I will fathom the depths of their wickedness).

18:21 WHETHER THEY HAVE DONE [ACCORDING TO THE CRY OF IT] WHICH IS COME UNTO ME — If they persist in their rebellious ways, (כלה) an end will I make of them; if, however, they do not persist in their rebellious ways, I shall know what I shall do — punishing them only with suffering, but I will not make an end of them. — A similar phrase we find elsewhere, (Exodus 33:5) "There- fore now put off thy ornaments from thee that I may know what to do unto thee". — For this reason there is a separation marked by a פסיק between עשו and כלה, in order to separate in sense one word from the other. Our Teachers explained the word הכצעקתה "the cry of her", to refer to the cry of a certain girl whom they put to death in an unnatural manner because she had given food to a poor man, as is explained in the chapter Chelek (Sanhedrin 109b).

כבוַיִּפְנוּ מִשָּׁם֙ הָאֲנָשִׁ֔ים וַיֵּלְכ֖וּ סְדֹ֑מָה וְאַבְרָהָ֕ם
עוֹדֶ֥נּוּ עֹמֵ֖ד לִפְנֵ֥י יְהוָֽה׃

22 The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD.

כגוַיִּגַּ֣שׁ אַבְרָהָ֔ם וַיֹּאמַ֕ר הַאַ֥ף תִּסְפֶּ֖ה צַדִּ֥יק עִם־
רָשָֽׁע׃

23 Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?

כדאוּלַ֥י יֵ֛שׁ חֲמִשִּׁ֥ים צַדִּיקִ֖ם בְּת֣וֹךְ הָעִ֑יר הַאַ֥ף
תִּסְפֶּ֛ה וְלֹא־תִשָּׂ֥א לַמָּק֖וֹם לְמַ֣עַן חֲמִשִּׁ֣ים
הַצַּדִּיקִ֔ם אֲשֶׁ֖ר בְּקִרְבָּֽהּ׃

24 What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it?

כהחָלִ֣לָה לְךָ֔ מֵעֲשֹׂ֖ת | כַּדָּבָ֣ר הַזֶּ֑ה לְהָמִ֤ית
צַדִּיק֙ עִם־רָשָׁ֔ע וְהָיָ֥ה כַצַּדִּ֖יק כָּרָשָׁ֑ע חָלִ֣לָה לָּ֔ךְ
הֲשֹׁפֵ֥ט כָּל־הָאָ֖רֶץ לֹ֥א יַעֲשֶׂ֖ה מִשְׁפָּֽט׃

25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

כווַיֹּאמֶ֣ר יְהוָ֔ה אִם־אֶמְצָ֥א בִסְדֹ֛ם חֲמִשִּׁ֥ים
צַדִּיקִ֖ם בְּת֣וֹךְ הָעִ֑יר וְנָשָׂ֥אתִי לְכָל־הַמָּק֖וֹם
בַּעֲבוּרָֽם׃

26 And the LORD answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake."

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

22 **The men turned from there,** after being escorted by Abraham, **and went to Sodom; and Abraham was still standing before the Lord.** The revelation or conversation between God and Abraham was still in progress. Alternatively, this phrase has the same meaning as: The Lord was still standing before Abraham. 23 After God made His plans for Sodom known to Abraham, **Abraham approached, and he said: Will You destroy even the righteous with the wicked?** 24 **Perhaps there are fifty righteous people within the city; will You even destroy, and not tolerate the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people who are within it?** All populations contain different types of people. There must be some righteous individuals in Sodom. 25 If so, **it is inconceivable for You to do a thing like this, to kill the righteous with the wicked, and** that **the righteous shall be** given the same fate **as the wicked. It is inconceivable for You; shall the Judge of all the earth not practice justice?** 26 **The Lord said: If I find in Sodom fifty righteous people within the city, I will tolerate the entire place for their sake.**

SELECTED RASHI

18:22 BUT ABRAHAM STOOD YET BEFORE THE LORD — But surely it was not he (Abraham) who had gone to stand before Him, but it was the Holy One, blessed be He, Who had come to him and had said to him, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great" and it should therefore have written here, "And the Lord stood yet before Abraham"? But it is a variation such as writers make to avoid an apparently irreverent expression (Genesis Rabbah 49:7) (which our Rabbis, of blessed memory, altered, writing it thus).

18:23 AND ABRAHAM DREW NEAR — We find the verb נגש "to come near" used in the sense of coming near to wage war — (2 Samuel 10:13) "So Joab ... drew near unto the battle"; — of coming near to persuade by entreaty — (44:18) "And Judah came near to him [and said, Oh, my lord]" — and of coming near to pray — (1 Kings 18:36) "And Elijah the prophet came near [and said, O Lord, God of Abraham etc.]" Abraham employed all these methods — to fight, by speaking stern words, and to persuade by entreaty, and to pray (Genesis Rabbah 49:8).

18:23 האף תספה means wilt Thou also destroy. But according to the Targum of Onkelos which translates it (the word האף) in the sense of anger, the explanation would be as follows: will Your anger urge you to destroy righteous with wicked?

18:25 FAR BE IT FROM THEE — It is a profanation (חולין) of Yourself. People will say, "That is what He usually busies Himself with: He destroys every one, righteous and wicked alike" — and thus did You indeed do to the generation of the Flood and to that of the dispersal of nations (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 8).

כז וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר
אֶל־אֲדֹנָי וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר:

27 Abraham spoke up, saying, “Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes:

כח אוּלַי יַחְסְרוּן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם חֲמִשָּׁה
הֲתַשְׁחִית בַּחֲמִשָּׁה אֶת־כָּל־הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
אַשְׁחִית אִם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַחֲמִשָּׁה:

28 What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five?” And He answered, “I will not destroy if I find forty-five there.”

כט וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן
שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בַּעֲבוּר
הָאַרְבָּעִים:

29 But he spoke to Him again, and said, “What if forty should be found there?” And He answered, “I will not do it, for the sake of the forty.”

ל וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי וַאֲדַבְּרָה אוּלַי
יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם־
אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים:

30 And he said, “Let not my Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?” And He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

לא וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי
אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְׁחִית
בַּעֲבוּר הָעֶשְׂרִים:

31 And he said, “I venture again to speak to my Lord: What if twenty should be found there?” And He answered, “I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty.”

לב וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי וַאֲדַבְּרָה אַךְ־
הַפַּעַם אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם עֲשָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
אַשְׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֲשָׂרָה:

32 And he said, “Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there?” And He answered, “I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten.”

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

27 **Abraham** attempted to bargain. He **responded and said: Behold, I have presumed to speak to my Lord, and** yet **I am** mere **dust and ashes,** a lowly being. 28 **Perhaps the fifty righteous people will lack five,** as there might be only forty-five righteous people in Sodom. **Will You destroy the entire city for the** lack of only **five? He,** God, **said: I will not destroy** it, **if I find there forty-five.** 29 **He continued to speak to Him and said: Perhaps forty** righteous people **shall be found there. He said: I will not do it,** even **for the sake of the forty.** 30 **He said: Let my Lord please not be incensed, and I will speak. Perhaps thirty shall be found there. He said: I will not do it, if I find thirty there.** 31 **He said: Behold, I have presumed to speak to my Lord, perhaps twenty shall be found there. He said: I will not destroy, for the twenty.** 32 **He said: Please, let my Lord not be incensed, and I will speak only this time. Perhaps ten shall be found there. He said: I will not destroy, for the ten.** en righteous people is apparently the smallest community that can save the city.

SELECTED RASHI

18:32 PERADVENTURE THERE SHALL TEN BE FOUND THERE — For a smaller number he did not plead because he knew already of two instances where less than ten had failed to save the wicked. He said to himself: In the generation of the Flood there were eight righteous people, viz., Noah, his sons and their wives, and they could not save their generation (Genesis Rabbah 49:13), and for nine in association with God he had already pleaded but had found no acceptance.

33 When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

לגוַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּלָּה לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אַבְרָהָם
וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לִמְקֹמוֹ׃



THE READING · GENESIS 19:1–20

שלישי

Third Aliyah

Two angels arrive in Sodom in the evening, and Lot takes them into his house, where the men of Sodom, young and old, surround the door and demand that he bring out his guests so they can be intimate with them. After the angels strike the crowd with blinding light, they tell Lot that God has sent them to destroy the city, and at dawn they seize Lot, his wife, and his two daughters by the hand and lead them outside the city, where Lot asks to flee to a nearby small town instead of the hills. AI SUMMARY

1 The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the ground,

אוַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב וְלוֹט
יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־סְדֹם וַיַּרְא־לוֹט וַיָּקָם לִקְרָאתָם
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַפַּיִם אָרְצָה׃

2 he said, “Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant’s house to spend the night, and bathe your feet; then you may be on your way early.” But they said, “No, we will spend the night in the square.”

בוַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא־אֲדֹנַי סוּרוּ נָא אֶל־בֵּית
עַבְדְּכֶם וְלִינוּ וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּם
וַהֲלַכְתֶּם לְדַרְכְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִּי בָרְחוֹב נָלִין׃

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

33 **The Lord went,** He ascended, as it were, **when He concluded speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place,** presumably worried and preoccupied by the coming events. 1 **The two angels came to Sodom in the evening.** The Sages teach that the third angel did not travel to Sodom, because his mission had been fulfilled in informing Abraham and Sarah of their forthcoming son. The two other angels had tasks to perform in Sodom. **And Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom.** Sitting at the gate of a city was typically a sign of high status, as that was where the judges and town elders convened. **Lot saw them and rose to meet them, and he prostrated himself with his face to the earth.** Lot had either learned the attribute of hospitality from Abraham, or they had both learned it as a family tradition. 2 **He said: Behold now my lords; please turn aside to your servant’s house, stay the night, and wash your feet, and you shall awaken early and go on your way.** Lot’s proposal was less generous than that of Abraham, who had included food and drink as well. Nevertheless, Lot did offer them a place to rest. **They said: No, for we will stay the night in the street.**

ג וַיִּפְצַר־בָּם מְאֹד וַיָּסֻרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ
וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמַצּוֹת אָפָה וַיֹּאכֵלוּ׃

3 But he urged them strongly, so they turned his way and entered his house. He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

ד טֶּרֶם יִשְׁכָּבוּ וְאַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר אַנְשֵׁי סְדֹם נָסַבּוּ
עַל־הַבַּיִת מִנַּעַר וְעַד־זָקֵן כָּל־הָעָם מִקָּצֶה׃

4 They had not yet lain down, when the townspeople, the men of Sodom, young and old —all the people to the last man—gathered about the house.

ה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אַיֵּה הָאֲנָשִׁים
אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַלָּיְלָה הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְנֵדְעָה
אֹתָם׃

5 And they shouted to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them.”

ו וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתְחָה וְהַדֶּלֶת סָגַר
אַחֲרָיו׃

6 So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him,

ז וַיֹּאמַר אַל־נָא אַחַי תָּרֵעוּ׃

7 and said, “I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong.

ח הִנֵּה־נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ אִישׁ
אוֹצִיאָה־נָּא אֹתָהֶן אֲלֵיכֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן כַּטּוֹב
בְּעֵינֵיכֶם רַק לָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵל אַל־תַּעֲשׂוּ דָבָר כִּי־
עַל־כֵּן בָּאוּ בְּצֵל קֹרָתִי׃

8 Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof.”

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[3] **He implored them greatly, and** eventually **they turned aside to him and entered his house; he prepared a feast for them, he baked unleavened bread, and they ate.** He gave them food and drink as well, despite the fact that he did not initially refer to provisions. [4] **Before they,** the angels, **lay down** to sleep, **the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, from young to old, all the people from every quarter.** The mention of the men of Sodom evokes the earlier verse: “The men of Sodom were extremely wicked and sinful to the Lord” (13:13). [5] **They called to Lot, and said to him: Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, and we will be intimate with them.** The residents of the city demanded that Lot bring out his guests so that they could exploit them sexually. It was not clear at this point whether their demand was based on sexual desire or to demonstrate their absolute intolerance of guests.14 The only person in Sodom who accepted guests was Lot, who was not a native of the city. [6] **Lot went out to them,** the residents of the city, **to the entrance** of his home, **and he closed the door behind him,** to prevent them from entering the house. [7] **He said: Please, my brethren, do not do evil.** He requested that they forgo their wicked demand. [8] **Here now are my two** virgin **daughters who have not been intimate with a man; I will now bring them out to you, and you may do to them as is fit in your eyes. Only to these men do nothing, as for this they came under the shelter of my roof.**

SELECTED RASHI

19:3 AND THEY TURNED ASIDE UNTO HIM — They took a circuitous route towards his house (Genesis Rabbah 50:4).

19:3 AND HE BAKED UNLEAVENED BREAD —It was Passover (Genesis Rabbah 48:12).

ט וַיֹּאמְרוּ | גֶּשׁ־הָלְאָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֶחָד בָּא־לָגוּר
וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שָׁפוֹט עַתָּה נָרַע לְךָ מֵהֶם וַיִּפְצְרוּ
בָאִישׁ בְּלוֹט מְאֹד וַיִּגְּשׁוּ לִשְׁבֹּר הַדָּלֶת:

9 But they said, "Stand back! The fellow," they said, "came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." And they pressed hard against the person of Lot, and moved forward to break the door.

י וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־יָדָם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־לוֹט
אֲלֵיהֶם הַבָּיְתָה וְאֶת־הַדֶּלֶת סָגָרוּ:

10 But the men stretched out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door.

יא וְאֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת הִכּוּ
בַּסַּנְוֵרִים מִקָּטֹן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל וַיִּלְאוּ לִמְצֹא
הַפָּתַח:

11 And the people who were at the entrance of the house, young and old, they struck with blinding light, so that they were helpless to find the entrance.

יב וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶל־לוֹט עַד מִי־לְךָ פֹּה
חָתָן וּבָנֶיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ בָּעִיר הוֹצֵא
מִן־הַמָּקוֹם:

12 Then the men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters, or anyone else that you have in the city—bring them out of the place.

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

9 **They said: Move aside. And they said: This one came to reside, and he sits in judgment?** You are not a native of the city, but merely a sojourner who came to live here temporarily. How do you presume to pass judgment on our behavior? **Now we will treat you worse than them.** If you insist on protecting them, we will inflict an even worse punishment on you. It can be inferred from this statement that those surrounding the house were not motivated by sexual desire, but by a wish to inflict pain and humiliation on the guests. **They implored the man, Lot, and** when that attempt proved unsuccessful, they **approached to break the door,** which had been locked from the inside. 10 **The men,** the angels, who had the appearance of men, **extended their hand and brought Lot to them, to the house, and closed the door.** With their ability to perform miracles, the angels were able to spirit Lot into the house without letting the mob force its way inside. 11 **They smote the men who were at the entrance of the house with blindness** or blurred vision, **from small to great, so that they,** the residents, **were unable to find the entrance.** Consequently, the crowd ceased to pose a threat to Lot and his guests. 12 The angels had yet to perform the tasks for which they were sent: the destruction of Sodom and the rescue of Lot. Although Lot was not altogether righteous, he was saved due to Abraham, his uncle. **The men said to Lot: Who else have you here?** Do you have any family in the city? **A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and everyone whom you have in the city, remove from the place.**

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19:9 AND THEY SAID, STEP BACK — Get you away over there — as much as to say, Take yourself aside and keep away from us. Similarly wherever the word הלאה occurs in Scripture it has the meaning of further away. For example: (Numbers 17:2) "Scatter (הלאה) yonder"; (1 Samuel 20:22) "Behold the arrows are beyond thee (הלאה)" Thus גש הלאה signifies, withdraw yourself further away (old French Retire-toi de nous). It is an expression of contempt, signifying, "we do not take any notice of you!" Of a similar character are: (Isaiah 65:5) "Stand by thyself (אל תגש בי) come not near unto me", and (Isaiah 49:20) גשה לי "Give place to me that I may dwell" which means "withdraw aside for my sake (לי) that I may dwell where you are now". — They really meant to say to Lot: "You intercede for these strangers; how dare you!" In reply to what he had said to them regarding his daughters they answered: "Get out of the way" — a somewhat gentle expression — whilst with regard to his advocacy for the strangers they retorted, האחד בא לגור THIS MAN CAME TO SOJOURN — You are the only strange man amongst us, for you have come to sojourn here, וישפוט שפוט and you make yourself a Reprover of us!

יג כִּי־מַשְׁחִתִים אֲנַחְנוּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־
גָדְלָה צַעֲקָתָם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה וַיְשַׁלְּחֵנוּ יְהוָה
לְשַׁחֲתָהּ׃

13 For we are about to destroy this place; because the outcry against them before the LORD has become so great that the LORD has sent us to destroy it."

יד וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט וַיְדַבֵּר | אֶל־חֲתָנָיו | לֹקְחֵי בְנֹתָיו
וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־מַשְׁחִית
יְהוָה אֶת־הָעִיר וַיְהִי כִמְצַחֵק בְּעֵינֵי חֲתָנָיו׃

14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law as one who jests.

טו וּכְמוֹ הַשַּׁחַר עָלָה וַיָּאִיצוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים בְּלוֹט
לֵאמֹר קוּם קַח אֶת־אִשְׁתְּךָ וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי בְנֹתֶיךָ
הַנִּמְצָאֹת פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה בַּעֲוֹן הָעִיר׃

15 As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city."

טז וְיִתְמַהְמָּהּ | וַיַּחֲזִיקוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּיָדוֹ וּבְיַד־
אִשְׁתּוֹ וּבְיַד שְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו בְּחֶמְלַת יְהוָה עָלָיו
וַיֹּצִאֻהוּ וַיַּנִּחֻהוּ מִחוּץ לָעִיר׃

16 Still he delayed. So the men seized his hand, and the hands of his wife and his two daughters —in the LORD's mercy on him—and brought him out and left him outside the city.

יז וַיְהִי כְהוֹצִיאָם אֹתָם הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הִמָּלֵט
עַל־נַפְשֶׁךָ אַל־תַּבִּיט אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַל־תַּעֲמֹד בְּכָל־
הַכִּכָּר הָהָרָה הִמָּלֵט פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה׃

17 When they had brought them outside, one said, "Flee for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, lest you be swept away."

יח וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹט אֲלֵהֶם אַל־נָא אֲדֹנָי׃

18 But Lot said to them, "Oh no, my lord!

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13 For we are destroying this place, as their outcry, that of the oppressed and ill-treated in the city, **has amassed before the Lord, and the Lord sent us to destroy it. 14 Lot came out, and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had betrothed his daughters.** Lot told his sons-in-law, who were certainly natives of the city, what was about to happen. **And** he **said: Arise, depart from this place, for the Lord is destroying the city. But he seemed as one who jests in the eyes of his sons-in-law.** They did not believe him and ignored his warning. **15 About when the dawn broke, the angels urged Lot, saying: Arise; take your wife and your two daughters who are present, lest you** too **be destroyed in the iniquity of the city.** There is nothing we can do to save the rest of your family, whom you were unable to convince to flee. The time has arrived to leave the city. **16** Perhaps Lot himself did not completely believe the angels' warning. Their power to strike the residents of the city with blindness would certainly have impressed him, but he may still not not have entirely placed his confidence in them, and he may also have harbored concern about his uncertain future outside the city. Therefore, **he hesitated. And the men** forcefully **grasped his hand, the hand of his wife, and the hand of his two daughters** who were in the house. All this was performed **out of the compassion of the Lord for him;** although he was unworthy of being saved, it was the angels' task to save him, even against his will. **They took him out and placed him outside the city.** They led him by foot to the entrance to the city or supernaturally transported him to the city's outskirts. **17 It was when they took them out** that **he,** one of the angels, **said: Flee for your life; do not look behind you and do not stay in the entire plain** of the Jordan, which encircled Sodom. **Flee to the highlands** surrounding the plain, **lest you be destroyed. 18 Lot said to them: Please, no, my lords.**

SELECTED RASHI

19:16 BUT HE LINGERED in order to save his property.

19:17 LOOK NOT BEHIND THEE — You sinned with them but art saved through the merit of Abraham. It is not fitting that you should witness their doom whilst you yourself are escaping (Genesis Rabbah 50:11).

19 You have been so gracious to your servant, and have already shown me so much kindness in order to save my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die.

יט הִנֵּה־נָא מָצָא עַבְדְּךָ חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתַּגְדֵּל חַסְדְּךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי לְהַחֲיוֹת אֶת־נַפְשִׁי וְאָנֹכִי לֹא אוּכַל לְהִמָּלֵט הָהָרָה פֶּן־תִּדְבָּקַנִי הָרָעָה וָמַתִּי:

20 Look, that town there is near enough to flee to; it is such a little place! Let me flee there—it is such a little place—and let my life be saved."

כ הִנֵּה־נָא הָעִיר הַזֹּאת קְרֹבָה לָנוּס שָׁמָּה וְהִוא מִצְעָר אִמָּלְטָה נָּא שָׁמָּה הֲלֹא מִצְעָר הִוא וּתְחִי נַפְשִׁי:



THE READING · GENESIS 19:21–21:4

רביעי

Fourth Aliyah

Lot and his daughters flee Sodom as God destroys the cities of the Plain, and Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt. Avraham then goes to Gerar, where he again says his wife Sarah is his sister, and after God warns Abimelech in a dream, Abimelech restores Sarah to Avraham, God heals the household, and Sarah bears Yitzchak at the appointed time, whom Avraham circumcises on the eighth day. AI SUMMARY

21 He replied, "Very well, I will grant you this favor too, and I will not annihilate the town of which you have spoken.

כא וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה נָשָׂאתִי פָנֶיךָ גַּם לַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְבִלְתִּי הָפְכִּי אֶת־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:

22 Hurry, flee there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Hence the town came to be called Zoar.

כב מַהֵר הִמָּלֵט שָׁמָּה כִּי לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר עַד־בֹּאֲךָ שָׁמָּה עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הָעִיר צוֹעַר:

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19 **Please, behold, your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have increased your kindness that you have done with me to save my life. But I will not be able to flee to the highlands;** it is too far, the climb is exhausting and dangerous, and I am too old for such a challenging expedition. But I cannot remain on the plain either, **lest the evil overtake me and I die.** 20 **Here now, this city is near to flee there, and it is small; please, I will flee there.** Although it is a city with its own king (see 14:2), **is it not small** enough to escape destruction, **and** perhaps there **my life will be saved?** 21 **He,** the angel, **said to him: Behold,** not only have I taken you out of the city, but **I have granted your request for this matter as well, not to overturn the city of which you spoke.** I will destroy only the large cities on the plain, Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma, and Tzevoyim, but I will leave standing the city to which you referred. 22 **Hurry** and **flee there, as I will not be able to do anything until your arrival there.** Since an angel is only a messenger of God, he has no choice but to obey the instructions given to him. These angels had been directed to destroy the sinful cities and to save Lot. They could not strike the cities if that would put Lot in danger. The Torah notes: **Therefore,** because the city was small [mitz'ar], **he called the name of the city Tzoar.** This became an additional name of the city.

כגהַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָצָא עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְלוֹט בָּא צֹעַרָה:

כדוַיהוָה הִמְטִיר עַל־סְדֹם וְעַל־עֲמֹרָה גָּפְרִית וָאֵשׁ מֵאֵת יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמָיִם:

כהוַיַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים הָאֵל וְאֵת כָּל־הַכִּכָּר וְאֵת כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הֶעָרִים וְצֶמַח הָאֲדָמָה:

כווַתַּבֵּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נְצִיב מָלַח:

כזוַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָמַד שָׁם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה:

כחוַיַּשְׁקֵף עַל־פְּנֵי סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה וְעַל־כָּל־פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ הַכִּכָּר וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה עָלָה קִיטֹר הָאָרֶץ כְּקִיטֹר הַכִּבְשָׁן:

כטוַיְהִי בְּשַׁחֵת אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עָרֵי הַכִּכָּר וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהֲפֵכָה בַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־יָשַׁב בָּהֶן לוֹט:

[23] As the sun rose upon the earth and Lot entered Zoar,

[24] the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven.

[25] He annihilated those cities and the entire Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the ground.

[26] Lot's wife looked back, and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.

[27] Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before the LORD,

[28] and, looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of the Plain, he saw the smoke of the land rising like the smoke of a kiln.

[29] Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.

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[23] Lot and his family left at daybreak. A short while later, **the sun rose upon the earth, and Lot came to Tzoar.** [24] **The Lord rained brimstone and fire upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah,** as well as on Adma and Tzevoyim, **from the Lord from the heavens.** [25] Furthermore, **He overturned those cities, the entire plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and the vegetation of the earth.** Apart from the fire and brimstone, there was a massive earthquake that overturned the entire area, until nothing remained as it had been. [26] **His,** Lot's, **wife looked behind him,** despite the angel's warning. She had been rescued due to her relationship with Lot, but she may have been a native of Sodom, and apparently still felt connected to the city. Whether out of curiosity or emotional distress, she turned to look at her city, **and she became a pillar of salt.** This could be meant literally or metaphorically that she froze in place and died. [27] **Abraham arose early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord.** [28] **He looked over Sodom and Gomorrah, and over all the land of the plain** of the Jordan, the region that is currently the Dead Sea. **And he saw** that **behold, the smoke of the earth rose** thickly and in abundance, **like the smoke of a kiln.** In addition to the destruction wreaked by the earthquake, the entire plain was burnt, leaving no trace of anything that had stood there. [29] The Torah summarizes the previous events: **It was when God destroyed the cities of the plain,** and **God remembered Abraham. And** due to Abraham's merit, **He sent Lot from the midst of the upheaval, as He overturned the cities in which Lot lived.**

SELECTED RASHI

19:26 AND SHE BECAME A PILLAR OF SALT — By salt had she sinned and by salt was she punished. He (Lot) said to her once: "Give a little salt to these strangers" and she answered him, "Do you mean to introduce this bad custom, also, into our city?" (Genesis Rabbah 50:4).

ל וַיַּעַל לוֹט מִצּוֹעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בָּהָר וּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו עִמּוֹ כִּי יָרֵא לָשֶׁבֶת בְּצוֹעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּמְּעָרָה הוּא וּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו׃

30 Lot went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; and he and his two daughters lived in a cave.

לא וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה אָבִינוּ זָקֵן וְאִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ לָבוֹא עָלֵינוּ כְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃

31 And the older one said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world.

לב לְכָה נַשְׁקֶה אֶת־אָבִינוּ יַיִן וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ וּנְחַיֶּה מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע׃

32 Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father.”

לג וַתַּשְׁקֶיןָ אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יַיִן בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא וַתָּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשִׁכְבָהּ וּבְקוּמָהּ׃

33 That night they made their father drink wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.

לד וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה הֵן־שָׁכַבְתִּי אֶמֶשׁ אֶת־אָבִי נַשְׁקֶנּוּ יַיִן גַּם־הַלַּיְלָה וּבֹאִי שִׁכְבִי עִמּוֹ וּנְחַיֶּה מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע׃

34 The next day the older one said to the younger, “See, I lay with Father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go and lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father.”

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30 **Lot ascended from Tzoar and lived in the hills, and his two daughters with him, because he feared to live in Tzoar.** Lot had stayed in Tzoar on the first night, but he was afraid to remain there, as it was one of the cities of the plain that had originally been intended for punishment. As Lot suspected that its destruction had been merely delayed due to his presence and request, he felt anxious. Therefore, he eventually ascended into the mountains, as the angel had originally instructed him. **And he lived in a cave, he and his two daughters.** 31 Lot and his two daughters stayed alone in the cave, surrounded by total desolation. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah presumably prevented any traveler from approaching the area. Lot’s daughters did not know that the destruction was limited to Sodom and its environs. They assumed that a global catastrophe like the flood had occurred and that they were the only survivors. As stated earlier (verse 8), both were young and unmarried. Therefore, **the elder said to the younger: Our father is old;** we cannot expect that he will have use of his faculties for long. **And there is no man on the earth** aside from him **to consort with us in the way of the world.** The continuation of the human race depends on us. Although we are his daughters, we must act like the family of Adam, the first man, and procreate from family members, in order to prevent the extinction of humanity. 32 **Let us give our father wine to drink** so that he will be drunk, **and we will lie with him, and we will give life to offspring from our father.** Lot’s daughters chose to intoxicate their father rather than plan with him, whether out of concern that he would react negatively or because they were embarrassed to discuss the idea with him. 33 **They gave their father wine to drink that night.** The wine was likely brought from Tzoar, along with the other provisions they had taken for their survival. **The elder came and lay with her father, and** in his drunken state, **he did not know when she lay or when she arose.** 34 **It was the next day, and the elder said to the younger: Behold, I lay last night with my father.** Since I have already broken the taboo, **let us give him wine to drink tonight as well, and** you **come and lie with him; and we will give life to offspring from our father.** We cannot know yet if I have become pregnant. Since we must guarantee the survival of the human race, we will improve our chances of success if you lie with him as well.

SELECTED RASHI

19:31 AND THERE IS NOT A MAN IN THE EARTH — They thought that the whole world had been destroyed as in the time of the generation of the Flood. (Genesis Rabbah 51:8).

לה וַתַּשְׁקֶיןָ גַּם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יָיִן
וַתָּקָם הַצְּעִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב עִמּוֹ וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשִׁכְבָהּ
וּבְקֻמָהּ׃

35 That night also they made their father drink wine, and the younger one went and lay with him; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.

לו וַתַּהֲרֶיןָ שְׁתֵּי בְנוֹת־לוֹט מֵאֲבִיהֶן׃

36 Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father.

לז וַתֵּלֶד הַבְּכִירָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מוֹאָב הוּא
אֲבִי־מוֹאָב עַד־הַיּוֹם׃

37 The older one bore a son and named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today.

לח וְהַצְּעִירָה גַּם־הִוא יָלְדָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן־
עַמִּי הוּא אֲבִי בְנֵי־עַמּוֹן עַד־הַיּוֹם׃

38 And the younger also bore a son, and she called him Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

א וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם אַבְרָהָם אַרְצָה הַנֶּגֶב וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין־
קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיָּגָר בִּגְרָר׃

1 Abraham journeyed from there to the region of the Negeb and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While he was sojourning in Gerar,

ב וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲחֹתִי הִוא
וַיִּשְׁלַח אֲבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ גְּרָר וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שָׂרָה׃

2 Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.

ג וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ בַּחֲלוֹם הַלָּיְלָה
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הִנְּךָ מֵת עַל־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־לָקַחְתָּ
וְהִוא בְּעֻלַת בָּעַל׃

3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, for she is a married woman.”

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35 **They gave their father wine to drink that night as well. The younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay or when she arose.** 36 **Lot’s two daughters conceived from their father.** 37 **The elder gave birth to a son and called his name Moav; he is the ancestor of the Moavites to this day.** The name Moav can be understood to mean: From father [me’av]. 38 **The younger too gave birth to a son, and called his name Ben Ami,** which has a similar meaning, as the word ami can denote a close familial relationship (see, e.g., 49:29). Nevertheless, this was a more subtle reference to his sordid origins than Moav. **He is the ancestor of the descendants of Amon to this day.** 1 **Abraham journeyed from there to the land of the south; he lived between Kadesh and Shur,** in the Negev; **and he resided in Gerar,** one of the cities of the Philistines. 2 **Abraham said of Sarah his wife: She is my sister.** Although they arrived in a location that was smaller and less powerful than Egypt, nevertheless, Abraham adopted the same precautions he had used there. **Avimelekh king of Gerar sent** messengers **and took Sarah,** either for personal reasons or due to political and economic considerations. 3 Unlike in Egypt, **God came to Avimelekh in a dream at night, and He said to him: Behold, you shall die, because of the woman that you have taken, and she is married to a husband.**

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20:2 AND ABRAHAM SAID — This time he did not ask her consent but forcibly and against her inclination he stated that she was his sister, because she had already been taken once to Pharaoh’s house on account of this (Genesis Rabbah 52:4).

ד וַאֲבִימֶ֖לֶךְ לֹ֣א קָרַ֣ב אֵלֶ֑יהָ וַיֹּאמַ֕ר אֲדֹנָ֕י הֲגוֹי֥
גַּם־צַדִּ֖יק תַּהֲרֹֽג׃

4 Now Abimelech had not approached her. He said, "O Lord, will You slay people even though innocent?

ה הֲלֹ֤א הוּא֙ אָמַ֣ר לִ֔י אֲחֹתִ֖י הִ֣וא וְהִיא־גַ֥ם־הִ֛וא
אָמְרָ֥ה אָחִ֖י הֽוּא׃ בְּתֹ֥ם־לְבָבִ֛י וּבְנִקְיֹ֥ן כַּפַּ֖י
עָשִׂ֥יתִי זֹֽאת׃

5 He himself said to me, 'She is my sister'! And she also said, 'He is my brother.' When I did this, my heart was blameless and my hands were clean."

ו וַיֹּ֨אמֶר֙ אֵלָ֣יו הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים בַּחֲלֹ֕ם גַּ֣ם אָנֹכִ֔י יָדַ֕עְתִּי
כִּ֥י בְתֹם־לְבָבְךָ֖ עָשִׂ֣יתָ זֹּ֑את וָאֶחְשֹׂ֤ךְ גַּם־אָנֹכִי֙
אוֹתְךָ֔ מֵחֲטוֹ־לִ֖י עַל־כֵּ֣ן לֹא־נְתַתִּ֑יךָ לִנְגֹּ֖עַ אֵלֶֽיהָ׃

6 And God said to him in the dream, "I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against Me. That was why I did not let you touch her.

ז וְעַתָּ֗ה הָשֵׁ֤ב אֶֽשֶׁת־הָאִישׁ֙ כִּי־נָבִ֣יא ה֔וּא
וְיִתְפַּלֵּ֥ל בַּעַדְךָ֖ וָחְיֵ֑ה וְאִם־אֵינְךָ֣ מֵשִׁ֔יב דַּ֣ע כִּי־
מ֥וֹת תָּמ֖וּת אַתָּ֥ה וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָֽךְ׃

7 Therefore, restore the man's wife—since he is a prophet, he will intercede for you—to save your life. If you fail to restore her, know that you shall die, you and all that are yours."

ח וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֤ם אֲבִימֶ֙לֶךְ֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וַיִּקְרָ֖א לְכָל־עֲבָדָ֑יו
וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֔לֶּה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶ֖ם
וַיִּירְא֥וּ הָאֲנָשִׁ֖ים מְאֹֽד׃

8 Early next morning, Abimelech called his servants and told them all that had happened; and the men were greatly frightened.

ט וַיִּקְרָ֣א אֲבִימֶ֔לֶךְ לְאַבְרָהָ֖ם וַיֹּ֣אמֶר ל֑וֹ מָה־
עָשִׂ֣יתָ לָּ֔נוּ וּמָה־חָטָאתִי֙ לָ֣ךְ כִּֽי־הֵבֵ֔אתָ עָלַ֖י
וְעַל־מַמְלַכְתִּ֑י חֲטָאָ֤ה גְדֹלָה֙ מַעֲשִׂ֣ים אֲשֶׁ֔ר לֹא־
יֵעָשׂ֖וּ עָשִׂ֥יתָ עִמָּדִֽי׃

9 Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.

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[4] **Avimelekh had not approached her;** even before God spoke to him, he had not engaged in sexual relations with Sarah. **He said,** either in the dream or while awake: **Lord, will You kill** me when I am **a nation,** a king, **who is also righteous?** Avimelekh pleaded for his life: Why must I die? I have done no wrong. [5] **Did he,** Abraham, **not say to me: She is my sister? And she,** Sarah, **she too** as much as **said: He is my brother. In the innocence of my heart and in the cleanliness of my hands I did this.** [6] **God said to him in the dream: I also knew that in the innocence of your heart you did this, and I also prevented you from sinning to Me.** Although you were able to take her, I kept you from sinning further. **Therefore,** after you took her **I did not allow you to touch her.** [7] **Now, restore the man's wife, as he is a prophet, and he shall pray for you, and you will live.** The fact that Abraham is a prophet is not the reason Avimelekh must return his wife. Rather, God is saying that as Abraham is a prophet and a holy individual, his prayer has the power to ensure that Avimelekh will be spared. Therefore, the king would be advised not merely to return Sarah, but to ask Abraham to pray for him. **And if you do not restore her, know that you shall die, you and all that is yours.** [8] **Avimelekh rose early in the morning, and he called all his servants and spoke all these matters in their ears; and the men were very frightened,** due to the threat to their king's life. [9] **Avimelekh called Abraham, and said to him: What have you done to us, and what have I sinned to you, that you have brought upon me and upon my kingdom a great sin? Deeds that may not be done you have done to me.** Abraham did not answer Avimelekh's accusation, as he himself was not to blame. While Abraham had omitted some pertinent details, Avimelekh had taken Sarah without Abraham's express permission.

י וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם מָה רָאִיתָ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה:

[10] What, then," Abimelech demanded of Abraham, "was your purpose in doing this thing?"

יא וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם כִּי אָמַרְתִּי רַק אֵין־יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַהֲרָגוּנִי עַל־דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי:

[11] "I thought," said Abraham, "surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.

יב וְגַם־אָמְנָה אֲחֹתִי בַת־אָבִי הִוא אַךְ לֹא בַת־אִמִּי וַתְּהִי־לִי לְאִשָּׁה:

[12] And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's; and she became my wife.

יג וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִתְעוּ אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית אָבִי וָאֹמַר לָהּ זֶה חַסְדֵּךְ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עִמָּדִי אֶל כָּל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָבוֹא שָׁמָּה אִמְרִי־לִי אָחִי הוּא:

[13] So when God made me wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'Let this be the kindness that you shall do me: whatever place we come to, say there of me: He is my brother.'"

יד וַיִּקַּח אֲבִימֶלֶךְ צֹאן וּבָקָר וַעֲבָדִים וּשְׁפָחֹת וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם וַיָּשֶׁב לוֹ אֵת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:

[14] Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored his wife Sarah to him.

טו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אַרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ שֵׁב:

[15] And Abimelech said, "Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please."

טז וּלְשָׂרָה אָמַר הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף לְאָחִיךְ הִנֵּה הוּא־לָךְ כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר אִתָּךְ וְאֵת כֹּל וְנֹכָחַת:

[16] And to Sarah he said, "I herewith give your brother a thousand pieces of silver; this will serve you as vindication before all who are with you, and you are cleared before everyone."

יז וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אַבְרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּרְפָּא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאַמְהֹתָיו וַיֵּלֵדוּ:

[17] Abraham then prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his slave girls, so that they bore children;

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[10] When Abraham did not respond to his accusation, Avimelekh sought to determine his motive. **Avimelekh said to Abraham: What did you see that you did this thing?** [11] **Abraham said: Because I said: Surely there is no fear of God in this place.** Although I am unfamiliar with this area, the impression I received is that there is no fear of God. In such an environment no one heeds moral norms in the fundamental areas of murder and forbidden sexual relationships. **And** I thought: If I tell the truth about Sarah, **they will kill me over the matter of my wife.** [12] **Also,** I did not actually lie. **Indeed, she is my sister, the daughter of my father, but** she is **not the daughter of my mother.** Apparently, even then it was considered taboo to marry a maternal sister. **And she became my wife.** [13] **It was, when God caused me to wander from my father's house** and live as a nomad, that **I said to her: This is your kindness that you shall perform for me; at every place that we shall come, say of me: He is my brother.** [14] **Avimelekh took flocks and cattle, and slaves and maidservants, and he gave them to Abraham** as a gift, **and he restored his wife Sarah to him.** [15] **Avimelekh said: Behold, my land is before you: Live where it is fit in your eyes.** I will not hold this episode against you, and I grant you permission to stay here if you wish. [16] **And to Sarah he said:** The appearance of having left your husband's house and stayed with another man could cause a scandal. Therefore, **behold, I have given your brother** Abraham sheep, cattle, slaves, and maidservants worth a large sum, **a thousand pieces of silver**; **behold, it,** the gift, **is for you a covering of the eyes for all who are with you,** and it will cover the eyes of all who would look at you in a disparaging manner and malign you, **and for all** people **it is proven** by the compensation that you have behaved honorably and need not be ashamed. [17] **Abraham prayed to God,** as God had predicted to Avimelekh; **and God healed Avimelekh, his wife, and his maidservants, and they bore children.**

יח כִּי־עָצֹר עָצַר֙ יְהוָ֔ה בְּעַד֙ כָּל־רֶ֣חֶם לְבֵ֔ית
אֲבִימֶ֖לֶךְ עַל־דְּבַ֣ר שָׂרָ֑ה אֵ֖שֶׁת אַבְרָהָֽם׃

[18] for the LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

א וַיהוָ֖ה פָּקַ֣ד אֶת־שָׂרָ֑ה כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר אָמָ֖ר וַיַּ֥עַשׂ
יְהוָ֛ה לְשָׂרָ֖ה כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר דִּבֵּֽר׃

[1] The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.

ב וַתַּ֣הַר וַתֵּ֤לֶד שָׂרָה֙ לְאַבְרָהָ֔ם בֵּ֖ן לִזְקֻנָ֑יו לַמּוֹעֵ֗ד
אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּ֥ר אֹתוֹ֖ אֱלֹהִֽים׃

[2] Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken.

ג וַיִּקְרָ֣א אַבְרָהָ֔ם אֶת־שֵׁ֥ם בְּנ֖וֹ הַנּוֹלַד־ל֣וֹ אֲשֶׁר־
יָלְדָה־ל֥וֹ שָׂרָ֖ה יִצְחָֽק׃

[3] Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac.

ד וַיָּ֤מָל אַבְרָהָם֙ אֶת־יִצְחָ֣ק בְּנ֔וֹ בֶּן־שְׁמֹנַ֖ת יָמִ֑ים
כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר צִוָּ֖ה אֹת֥וֹ אֱלֹהִֽים׃

[4] And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him.

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[18] The Torah explains why Avimelekh submitted so quickly to God's command: **For the Lord had obstructed all wombs of the house of Avimelekh, over the matter of Sarah, Abraham's wife.** During the time that Sarah was in Avimelekh's house, no children were born to the household, neither to Avimelekh's wives nor to his maidservants. Avimelekh feared that this condition would become even more serious. Once Abraham prayed for him, this affliction in Avimelekh's household abated. [1] **The Lord remembered [pakad] Sarah.** The term pakad refers to remembering to fulfill a need or a lack. The Lord blessed her with a pregnancy **as He had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as He had spoken.** [2] **Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the designated time that God had told him,** one year after the angels had visited his tent. [3] **Abraham called the name of his son that was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac,** as God had commanded. Isaac, whose name means: He will laugh, was born in the wake of the laughter of both Abraham (17:17) and Sarah (18:12). Moreover, his name alludes both to his character and to later events in his life. [4] **Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him** above (17:12). Isaac was the first child of Abraham to be born after God's commandment with regard to circumcision, and was therefore the first to be circumcised on the eighth day.

SELECTED RASHI

21:1 AND THE LORD VISITED SARAH —It (Scripture) places this section after the preceding one to teach you that whoever prays for mercy on behalf of another when he himself also is in need of that very thing for which he prays on the other's behalf, will himself first receive a favorable response from God, for it is said (at end of last chapter), "And Abraham prayed for Abimelech and his wife and they brought forth" and immediately afterwards it states here, "And the Lord remembered Sarah" — i. e. he had already remembered her before he healed Abimelech (Bava Kamma 92a).

THE READING · GENESIS 21:5–21

חמישי

Fifth Aliyah



Sarah sees Yishmael playing and asks Avraham to send him and Hagar away so that Yishmael will not share in Yitzchak's inheritance; God tells Avraham to do as Sarah says, promising that Yitzchak will carry on his line and that Yishmael will also become a nation. Avraham sends Hagar and the boy into the wilderness of Beer-sheba with bread and water, and when the water runs out, God hears the boy's cry, opens Hagar's eyes to a well, and the boy grows up in the wilderness of Paran, where his mother finds him a wife from Egypt. AI SUMMARY

[5] Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

ה וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן־מְאַת שָׁנָה בְּהִוָּלֶד לוֹ אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ׃

[6] Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me."

ו וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרָה צְחֹק עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹהִים כָּל־ הַשֹּׁמֵעַ יִצְחַק־לִי׃

[7] And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham That Sarah would suckle children! Yet I have borne a son in his old age."

ז וַתֹּאמֶר מִי מִלֵּל לְאַבְרָהָם הֵינִיקָה בָנִים שָׂרָה כִּי־יָלַדְתִּי בֵן לְזִקֻנָיו׃

[8] The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

ח וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּגָּמַל וַיַּעַשׂ אַבְרָהָם מִשְׁתֶּה גָּדוֹל בְּיוֹם הִגָּמֵל אֶת־יִצְחָק׃

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[5] **Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.** [6] **Sarah said: God has made laughter for me.** This is a strange and happy occurrence, prompting laughter. **Everyone who hears will laugh for me.** The unlikely event of this birth and the gladness it brings me will cause everyone who hears of it to share in my joy. [7] **She said: Who would have said of Abraham that Sarah would nurse children,** as has happened? I have been married to Abraham for many years without children, and now the impossible has occurred, **as I bore** him **a son for his old age.** [8] **The child grew and was weaned.** It is unclear when this occurred, as nursing sometimes continued until age three. **Abraham made a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned,** in accordance with the prevalent custom to celebrate a child's weaning.

ט וַתֵּ֣רֶא שָׂרָ֗ה אֶת־בֶּן־הָגָר֙ הַמִּצְרִ֔ית אֲשֶׁר־
יָלְדָ֖ה לְאַבְרָהָ֑ם מְצַחֵֽק׃

[9] Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing.

SFORNO & IBN EZRA P. 56 Was Yishmael's mocking malicious, or just childish play?

י וַתֹּ֣אמֶר לְאַבְרָהָ֗ם גָּרֵ֤שׁ הָאָמָה֙ הַזֹּ֣את וְאֶת־
בְּנָ֔הּ כִּ֣י לֹ֤א יִירַשׁ֙ בֶּן־הָאָמָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את עִם־בְּנִ֖י
עִם־יִצְחָֽק׃

[10] She said to Abraham, "Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

יא וַיֵּ֥רַע הַדָּבָ֖ר מְאֹ֑ד בְּעֵינֵ֕י אַבְרָהָ֖ם עַ֥ל אוֹדֹ֥ת
בְּנֽוֹ׃

[11] The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his.

יב וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֱלֹהִים֙ אֶל־אַבְרָהָ֔ם אַל־יֵרַ֥ע בְּעֵינֶ֖יךָ
עַל־הַנַּ֣עַר וְעַל־אֲמָתֶ֑ךָ כֹּ֣ל אֲשֶׁר֩ תֹּאמַ֨ר אֵלֶ֜יךָ
שָׂרָ֗ה שְׁמַ֤ע בְּקֹלָהּ֙ כִּ֣י בְיִצְחָ֔ק יִקָּרֵ֥א לְךָ֖ זָֽרַע׃

[12] But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you.

יג וְגַ֨ם אֶת־בֶּן־הָאָמָ֤ה לְגוֹי֙ אֲשִׂימֶ֔נּוּ כִּ֥י זַרְעֲךָ֖
הֽוּא׃

[13] As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed."

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[9] **Sarah saw** Ishmael, **the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she,** Hagar, **bore to Abraham, playing.** [10] **She said to Abraham: Banish this maidservant and her son.** By rights you should banish only the son, but as he is young and needs his mother, you must send her away as well. **For the son of this maidservant shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac.** [11] **The matter was very grave in the eyes of Abraham, on account of his son.** Abraham was more pained about banishing Ishmael than about banishing Hagar. He may also have better understood Sarah's discomfort with Hagar's presence than he did her objection to Ishmael. [12] But **God said to Abraham: Let it not be grave in your eyes about the lad and about your maidservant.** Significantly, God included Hagar in this statement. **Everything that Sarah says to you, heed her voice.** Whether or not you understand and identify with Sarah's demand, it is My will that you should listen to her, **for it is through Isaac that descendants will be accounted to you.** You have a son from Sarah, and even if you have other biological children, only Isaac will be your heir and successor, and only his descendants will be attributed to you. [13] **Also the son of the maidservant I will make a nation.** He is not simply being discarded, **because he is your descendant,** and your merit stands in his favor. He too will be the father of a great people, although they will not be known as Abraham's unique descendants.

SELECTED RASHI

21:9 MAKING SPORT — This means worshipping idols, as it is said in reference of the Golden Calf, (Exodus 32:6) "And they rose up to make merry (לצחק)." Another explanation is that it refers to immoral conduct, just as you say in reference to Potiphar's wife, (Genesis 39:17) "To mock (לצחק) at me." Another explanation is that it refers to murder, as (2 Samuel 2:14) "Let the young men, I pray thee, arise and make sport (וישחקו) before us" (where they fought with and killed one another) From Sarah's reply — "for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son" — you may infer that he (Ishmael) was quarrelling with Isaac about the inheritance, saying, "I am the firstborn and will, therefore, take a double portion". They went into the field and he (Ishmael) took his bow and shot arrows at him (Isaac), just as you say (Proverbs 26:18-19) "As a madman who casteth firebrands, [arrows and death] and says: I am only מצחק mocking" (Genesis Rabbah 53:11).

21:12 HEARKEN UNTO HER VOICE — we may infer that Abraham was inferior to Sarah in respect of prophecy (Exodus Rabbah 1:1).

יד וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם | בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח־לֶחֶם וְחֵמַת
מַיִם וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הָגָר שָׂם עַל־שִׁכְמָהּ וְאֶת־הַיֶּלֶד
וַיְשַׁלְּחֶהָ וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּתַע בְּמִדְבַּר בְּאֵר שָׁבַע:

14 Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

טו וַיִּכְלוּ הַמַּיִם מִן־הַחֵמֶת וַתַּשְׁלֵךְ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד
תַּחַת אַחַד הַשִּׂיחִם:

15 When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes,

טז וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב לָהּ מִנֶּגֶד הַרְחֵק כִּמְטַחֲוֵי קֶשֶׁת
כִּי אָמְרָה אַל־אֶרְאֶה בְּמוֹת הַיֶּלֶד וַתֵּשֶׁב מִנֶּגֶד
וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת־קֹלָהּ וַתֵּבְךְּ:

16 and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, "Let me not look on as the child dies." And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears.

יז וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־קוֹל הַנַּעַר וַיִּקְרָא מַלְאַךְ
אֱלֹהִים | אֶל־הָגָר מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַה־
לָּךְ הָגָר אַל־תִּירְאִי כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל
הַנַּעַר בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם:

17 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.

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

14 **Abraham rose early in the morning;** he **took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, placed it on her shoulder, and** gave her **the child, and sent her away. She went and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.** Although she may have planned on traveling to her native Egypt, in any event, she wandered in the wilderness instead of reaching any place of human habitation. 15 Eventually, **the water in the skin** Abraham had given her **was finished, and she cast the child** into the shade **beneath one of the bushes** in the desert. This description supports the opinion that Ishmael was sick, as perhaps he had fainted and was unable to walk. 16 **She went and sat herself down at a** far **distance, approximately a bowshot removed.** In biblical times, an arrow could be shot approximately 170 m. She was at a distance from her son but presumably could still see him and hear his cries. **For she said: I** do not want to sit close to him, so that I **will not see the death of the child. She sat at a distance, raised her voice, and wept.** 17 **God heard the voice of the lad; the angel of God called to Hagar from the heavens and said to her: What is it with you, Hagar? Fear not, as God has heard the voice of the lad as he is there.** His cries and needs are heard above. In all places and whatever the circumstances, God protects Ishmael.

SELECTED RASHI

21:17 THE VOICE OF THE LAD — From this we may infer that the prayer of a sick person is more effective than the prayer offered by others for him and that it is more readily accepted (Genesis Rabbah 53:14).

21:17 WHERE HE IS — According to the actions he is now doing shall he be judged and not according to what he may do in future. Because the ministering angels laid information against him, saying, "Master of the Universe, for him whose descendants will at one time kill your children with thirst will You provide a well?" He asked them, "What is he now, righteous or wicked?" They replied to him, "Righteous." He said to them, "According to his present deeds will I judge him." This is the meaning of what is written: "[For God hath heard the voice of the lad] באשר הוא שם in that condition in which he now is" (Genesis Rabbah 53:14). Where did he (Ishmael) kill Israel with thirst? When Nebuchadnezzar carried them into exile — as it is said, (Isaiah 21:13, 14) "The burden upon Arabia ... O ye caravans of Dedanites, unto him that is thirsty bring ye water! etc." When they were bringing them near the Arabians the Israelites said to their captors, "We beg of you bring us to the children of our uncle, Ishmael, who will certainly show pity to us", as it is said, "O ye caravans of the Dedanites (דדנים)"; read not דדנים but דודים, kinsmen. — These indeed came to them bringing them salted meat and fish and water-skins inflated with air. The Israelites believed that these were full of water and when they placed them in their mouths, after having opened them, the air entered their bodies and they died (Eichah Rabbah 2:4).

18 Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him."

יח קוּמִי שְׂאִי אֶת־הַנַּעַר וְהַחֲזִיקִי אֶת־יָדֵךְ בּוֹ כִּי־לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשִׂימֶנּוּ׃

19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink.

יט וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא בְּאֵר מָיִם וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתְּמַלֵּא אֶת־הַחֵמֶת מַיִם וַתַּשְׁקְ אֶת־הַנָּעַר׃

BERESHIT RABBAH 53:14 P. 47 God judges each person by who they are right now

20 God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman.

כ וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַנַּעַר וַיִּגְדָּל וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיְהִי רֹבֶה קַשָּׁת׃

21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

כא וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַּר פָּארָן וַתִּקַּח־לוֹ אִמּוֹ אִשָּׁה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

18 **Rise, lift up the lad,** since he is too weak to walk on his own, **and hold him with your hand** to support him, **for I will make** of **him a great nation.** He will not die yet, as a mighty nation will descend from him. 19 **God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad to drink.** This drink revived the dehydrated Ishmael. 20 **God was with the lad, and he grew; he lived in the wilderness and became an archer,** skilled at hunting with bow and arrows. 21 **He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took him a wife from the land of Egypt,** her native land. Here, in the wilderness of Paran, the career of Ishmael began, and he ultimately became the patriarch of a great nation.



THE READING · GENESIS 21:22–34

שישי

Sixth Aliyah

Abimelech and his army chief Phicol come to Avraham and ask him to swear that he will deal kindly with them and their descendants, as they have dealt kindly with him. Avraham agrees, reproaches Abimelech over a well his servants had seized, and they make a covenant at Beer-sheba, where Avraham sets aside seven ewes as witness that he dug the well; the place is named for their mutual oath, and Avraham plants a tamarisk there, calls on the name of the LORD, and stays in the land of the Philistines for many days. AI SUMMARY

כב וַיְהִי֙ בָּעֵ֣ת הַהִ֔וא וַיֹּ֨אמֶר֙ אֲבִימֶ֣לֶךְ וּפִיכֹ֔ל
שַׂר־צְבָא֖וֹ אֶל־אַבְרָהָ֣ם לֵאמֹ֑ר אֱלֹהִ֣ים עִמְּךָ֔
בְּכֹ֖ל אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּ֥ה עֹשֶֽׂה׃

22 At that time Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, said to Abraham, “God is with you in everything that you do.

כג וְעַתָּ֗ה הִשָּׁבְעָ֤ה לִּי֙ בֵּאלֹהִ֔ים הֵ֚נָּה אִם־תִּשְׁקֹ֣ר
לִ֔י וּלְנִינִ֖י וּלְנֶכְדִּ֑י כַּחֶ֨סֶד֙ אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂ֣יתִי עִמְּךָ֔
תַּעֲשֶׂ֥ה עִמָּדִ֖י וְעִם־הָאָ֥רֶץ אֲשֶׁר־גַּ֖רְתָּה בָּֽהּ׃

23 Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin, but will deal with me and with the land in which you have sojourned as loyally as I have dealt with you.”

כד וַיֹּ֥אמֶר אַבְרָהָ֖ם אָנֹכִ֥י אִשָּׁבֵֽעַ׃

24 And Abraham said, “I swear it.”

כה וְהוֹכִ֣חַ אַבְרָהָ֔ם אֶת־אֲבִימֶ֖לֶךְ עַל־אֹד֣וֹת בְּאֵ֣ר
הַמַּ֑יִם אֲשֶׁ֥ר גָּזְל֖וּ עַבְדֵ֥י אֲבִימֶֽלֶךְ׃

25 Then Abraham reproached Abimelech for the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized.

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

22 **It was at that time,** after Abraham had fathered a son, that **Avimelekh and Pikhol, the captain of his guard, said to Abraham, saying:** Although you are not the ruler of a great kingdom, we see that **God is with you in all that you do.** They began this political discussion by invoking God. 23 **Now take an oath to me here by God that you shall not deceive** or betray **me, or my son, or my son’s son; like the kindness that I have done with you** in allowing you to live within my territory and in taking a certain responsibility for your welfare, **do with me** personally, **and** also **with the land in which you resided.** 24 **Abraham said: I will** agree to **take an oath** and pledge to be trustworthy in my relations with your people and country. 25 On this same occasion, **Abraham reprimanded Avimelekh with regard to the well of water that Avimelekh’s servants had stolen.** Abraham had previously dug a well, which Avimelekh’s servants then took by force. Abraham had not complained at that point, but once he was negotiating a covenant with Avimelekh, he decided to raise the matter. Since Avimelekh had publicly declared that he had a positive relationship with Abraham and had treated him with kindness, Abraham found it appropriate to note the unresolved issues in their relationship and try to reconcile them.

כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ לֹא יָדַעְתִּי מִי עָשָׂה אֶת־
הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְגַם־אַתָּה לֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִי וְגַם אָנֹכִי
לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי בִּלְתִּי הַיּוֹם:

[26] But Abimelech said, "I do not know who did this; you did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today."

BERESHIT RABBAH 54:3 P. 44 Real love and real peace both include honest rebuke

כז וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם צֹאן וּבָקָר וַיִּתֵּן לַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ
וַיִּכְרְתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּרִית:

[27] Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a pact.

כח וַיַּצֵּב אַבְרָהָם אֶת־שֶׁבַע כִּבְשֹׂת הַצֹּאן
לְבַדָּהֶן:

[28] Abraham then set seven ewes of the flock by themselves,

כט וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם מָה הֵנָּה שֶׁבַע
כְּבָשֹׂת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר הִצַּבְתָּ לְבַדָּנָה:

[29] and Abimelech said to Abraham, "What mean these seven ewes which you have set apart?"

ל וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֶת־שֶׁבַע כְּבָשֹׂת תִּקַּח מִיָּדִי
בַּעֲבוּר תִּהְיֶה־לִּי לְעֵדָה כִּי חָפַרְתִּי אֶת־הַבְּאֵר
הַזֹּאת:

[30] He replied, "You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well."

לא עַל־כֵּן קָרָא לַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בְּאֵר שָׁבַע כִּי שָׁם
נִשְׁבְּעוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם:

[31] Hence that place was called Beer-sheba, for there the two of them swore an oath.

לב וַיִּכְרְתוּ בְרִית בִּבְאֵר שָׁבַע וַיָּקָם אֲבִימֶלֶךְ
וּפִיכֹל שַׂר־צְבָאוֹ וַיָּשֻׁבוּ אֶל־אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים:

[32] When they had concluded the pact at Beer-sheba, Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, departed and returned to the land of the Philistines.

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[26] **Avimelekh said: I do not know who did this thing; and you also did not tell me** it had happened, **nor did I hear of it, other than today.** I can take no responsibility for the incident. I did not send those people, and I never heard anything about this incident until now. By this statement, Avimelekh conceded that the well belonged to Abraham. [27] **Abraham took flocks and cattle and gave them to Avimelekh** as a gift and as his contribution to the feast prepared there. **And the two of them established a covenant.** The covenant may have been formalized by a ceremony in which the animals were cut in half. [28] **Abraham placed,** set aside, **seven ewes of the flock** he had given as a gift **by themselves.** [29] **Avimelekh said to Abraham: What are these seven ewes that you have placed by themselves?** If you intend to give them to me or to contribute them to the feast, why did you separate them from the rest of the flock? [30] **He,** Abraham, **said: Because you shall take seven ewes from me, so that it will be for me as a testament, that I dug this well.** These seven sheep will symbolize your consent that the well belongs to me, like an addendum to our covenant. By accepting them you give your assurance that your servants will not steal the well from me again. [31] **Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because both of them took an oath there.** The name evokes both the oath [shevua] about the well [be'er] and the number seven [sheva]. [32] **They established a covenant in Beersheba.** Then **Avimelekh and Pikhol, the captain of his guard, arose, and they returned to the land of the Philistines,** from where they had traveled to the place of Abraham's encampment.

לגוַיִּטַּע אֶשֶׁל בִּבְאֵר שָׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא־שָׁם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֵל עוֹלָם:

לדוַיָּגָר אַבְרָהָם בְּאֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים יָמִים רַבִּים:

33 [Abraham] planted a tamarisk at Beer-sheba, and invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.

34 And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time.



THE READING · GENESIS 22:1–24

שביעי
Seventh Aliyah

God tests Avraham by commanding him to offer his son Yitzchak, his favored and only son, as a burnt offering on a mountain in the land of Moriah; when Avraham is about to slay him, an angel of the LORD stops him, and a ram caught in a thicket is offered in Yitzchak's place, after which God renews His promise of blessing and numerous descendants to Avraham. AI SUMMARY

אוַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי:

1 Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am."

RAMBAN & RASHBAM P. 50 Why did God test Abraham if He knew the outcome?

THE NETZIV P. 73 Why did God test Avraham after all his earlier blessings?

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

33 **He,** Abraham, **planted a tamarisk in Beer-sheba, and he proclaimed there the name of the Lord, God of the Universe.** This was Abraham's practice throughout his travels. Wherever he encamped, he would build an altar, teach the residents of that place about God, and make His name known to them. 34 **Abraham** did not return immediately to Hebron, but **resided in the land of the Philistines** for **many days.** 1 **It was** not long **after these** previous **matters; God tested Abraham.** This is the first event explicitly described as a test planned by God. **And** God **said to him: Abraham; and he said: Here I am.** Abraham's response indicates not only that he has heard God's call but that he is ready to receive His command.

SELECTED RASHI

21:33 AND HE CALLED THERE etc. — Through this Eshel the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, was called "God of the entire Universe". For after they had eaten and drunk he said to them, "Bless Him of whose possessions you have eaten! Do you think that you have eaten of what is mine? You have eaten of that which belongs to Him Who spake and the Universe came into existence" (Sotah 10a).

22:1 AFTER THESE THINGS [or, WORDS] —Some of our Rabbis say (Sanhedrin 89b) that it means after the words of Satan who denounced Abraham saying, "Of all the banquets which Abraham prepared not a single bullock nor a single ram did he bring as a sacrifice to You '. God replied to him, "Does he do anything at all except for his son's sake? Yet if I were to bid him, "Sacrifice him to Me'', he would not refuse''. Others say that it means "after the words of Ishmael" who boasted to Isaac that he had been circumcised when he was thirteen years old without resisting. Isaac replied to him, "You think to intimidate me by mentioning the loss of one part of the body! If the Holy One, blessed be He, were to tell me, "Sacrifice yourself to Me" I would not refuse" (Sanhedrin 89b).

22:1 HERE AM I — Such is the answer of the pious: it is an expression of meekness and readiness (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 22).

[2] And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you."

ב וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־
אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה
וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר
אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ׃

BERESHIT RABBAH 56:10 P. 45 Why Jerusalem's name joins two righteous men's names

BERESHIT RABBAH 56:8 P. 46 Why did God ask Abraham to offer Isaac if He never meant for him to die?

[3] So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.

ג וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ
וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ וְאֵת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיְבַקַּע עֲצֵי עֹלָה וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־
אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים׃

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[2] **He,** God, **said: Take now your son, your only one,** as Abraham's other son had been banished and was not considered an heir, **whom you love: Isaac.** This long string of descriptions serves to underscore the monumental demand God is about to make. **And go you to the land of Moriah,** traditionally associated with the area of Jerusalem, **and offer him up there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I will tell you.** [3] Once again, **Abraham** wasted no time. Since he had received the command only at night or just before, he **awoke early in the morning and saddled his donkey,** to carry the items he required for the journey. **He took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son;** and **he cleaved the wood for the burnt offering,** as he could not know if he would find more wood on the way. He **arose, and** he **went,** striding purposefully **to the place that God told him,** as he knew where it was.

SELECTED RASHI

22:2 TAKE NOW — The word נא is used as a request: God said to him, "I beg of you, stand firm for me in this trial, so that people may not say that the previous trials were no real tests" (Sanhedrin 89b).

22:2 THY SON — Abraham said to God, "I have two sons". "He answered him, "Thine only son". Abraham said, "This one is the only son of his mother and the other is the only son of his mother". God then said, "the one whom thou lovest". Abraham replied, "I love both of them". Whereupon God said "even Isaac". Why did He not disclose this to him at the very first? So as not to confuse him suddenly lest his mind become distracted and bewildered and in his confused state he would involuntarily consent, when there would have been no merit in his sacrifice, and so that he might more highly value God's command and that God might reward him for the increasing sacrifice demanded by obedience to each and every expression used here (Genesis Rabbah 55:7).

22:2 THE LAND OF MORIAH — This is Jerusalem, and so we find in Chronicles (2 Chronicles 3:1) "To build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah". Our Rabbis have explained that it is called Moriah — Instruction — because from it (i.e. from the Temple built on that mountain) instruction הוראה came forth to Israel (Genesis Rabbah 55:7). Onkelos translates it by "the land of the Divine Service". He takes it as having reference to the offering of incense brought in the Temple on Moriah in which there were myrrh (מור) nard and other spices.

22:2 AND OFFER HIM (literally, bring him up) — He did not say, "Slay him", because the Holy One, blessed be He, did not desire that he should slay him, but he told him to bring him up to the mountain to prepare him as a burnt offering. So when he had taken him up, God said to him, "Bring him down" (Genesis Rabbah 56:8).

22:2 ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS — The Holy One, blessed be He, first makes the righteous expectant and only afterwards discloses fully to them his intention — and all this in order to augment their reward. Similarly we have (Genesis 12:1) "[Go to] the land which I will show thee", and similarly in the case of Jonah 3:2 "Make unto it the proclamation which I shall bid thee" (Genesis Rabbah 55:7).

22:3 AND HE ROSE EARLY — He was alert to fulfil the command (Pesachim 4a)

22:3 AND HE SADDLED [HIS ASS]—He himself: he did not order one of his servants to do so, for love disregards the rule imposed on one by his exalted position in life. ("Love" here means Love of God as displayed in obedience to His command.) (Genesis Rabbah 55:8)

ד בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא
אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרָחֹק:

4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.

ה וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־
הַחֲמוֹר וַאֲנִי וְהַנַּעַר נֵלְכָה עַד־כֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה
וְנָשׁוּבָה אֲלֵיכֶם:

5 Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."

ו וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֲצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיָּשֶׂם עַל־יִצְחָק
בְּנוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת
וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.

ז וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֶּנִּי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ וְהָעֵצִים
וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה:

7 Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"

ח וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה
בְּנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:

8 And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

4 Abraham started his journey in Beersheba, many hours from Jerusalem, on foot. Since he and Isaac had only one donkey and were traveling together, the journey took three days. **On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.** 5 **Abraham said to his young men: Stay here with the donkey** and wait for me, **and I and the lad will go there; we will prostrate ourselves,** pray or sacrifice an offering, **and will return to you.** Abraham does not reveal his intention to sacrifice his son. Instead, he gives his attendants the impression that he and Isaac will sacrifice an offering together and then return.

6 **Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and placed it upon Isaac his son.** By carrying the wood, Isaac was already participating in the sacrifice. **He,** Abraham, **took in his hand the fire,** the kindling, **and the knife, and the two of them went together.** 7 Now that they were alone **Isaac said to Abraham his father; he said: My father. He,** Abraham, **said** to him, as he had responded earlier to God: **Here I am, my son,** ready and attentive. Abraham has not become any less fatherly toward Isaac, and he listens with a loving ear, despite the knowledge that he must sacrifice him. **He,** Isaac, **said: Here are the fire and the wood, but** if our intention is to sacrifice an animal, **where is the lamb for a burnt offering?**

8 **Abraham said,** in a poignant response: **God will Himself see to the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.** At this point, Isaac surely began to ponder: What if we do not find a lamb? The juxtaposition of "burnt offering" and "my son" would have rung in his ears, as Isaac was no doubt aware of the practice of human sacrifice among the surrounding peoples. Nevertheless, the verse repeats the phrase indicating their solidarity: **And the two of them went together.** Earlier, Abraham was deeply troubled and Isaac was entirely innocent, and they went together. Now Isaac has heard Abraham's frightening words, but he continues to walk with his father, without any attempt to escape.

SELECTED RASHI

22:4 AND HE SAW THE PLACE — He saw a cloud lowering over the mountain (Genesis Rabbah 56:1).

22:5 YONDER — meaning a short distance: to the place in front of us. The Midrashic explanation (based upon the meaning of כה "thus") is: I will see where will be (i.e. what will happen to) the promise which God made to me, (Genesis 15:5) "Thus (כה) shall thy seed be" (Genesis Rabbah 56:2).

22:5 AND WE WILL COME BACK — He prophesied that they would both return (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 22).

22:6 AND THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER — Abraham who was aware that he was going to slay his son walked along with the same willingness and joy as Isaac who had no idea of the matter.

22:8 יראה לו השה — this means as much as: He will look out for and choose a lamb for Himself, and if there will be no lamb for a burnt offering, then, בני MY SON will be the offering. Although Isaac then understood that he was travelling on to be slain, yet.

22:8 THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER — with the same ready heart (Genesis Rabbah 56:4).

ט וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת־
הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל־
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים:

9 They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

י וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת
לִשְׁחֹט אֶת־בְּנוֹ:

10 And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son.

יא וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָהָם | אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי:

11 Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am."

יב וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנַּעַר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ
לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי | עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים
אַתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי:

12 And he said, "Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me."

PIRKEI DERABBI ELIEZER 31:10 P. 47 Yitzchak's soul left him and then returned at the altar

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[9] **They came to the place that God had told him; Abraham built the altar there, arranged the wood, and bound** the hands and feet of **Isaac his son** to prevent him from moving, **and he placed him on the altar upon the wood.** He completed his preparation of Isaac as an offering. [10] **Abraham raised his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.** [11] **The angel of the Lord called to him from the heavens.** Since the angel is a messenger of God, its statement is the word of God. **And** he **said: Abraham, Abraham.** Again, **he,** Abraham, **said: Here I am,** always ready to be commanded, even in the midst of such a superhuman effort as this. [12] **He said: Do not raise your hand to the lad, and do not do anything to him; for now I know that you are God-fearing, and you did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me.**

SELECTED RASHI

22:11 ABRAHAM, ABRAHAM — The repetition of his name is an expression of affection (Genesis Rabbah 56:7).

22:12 LAY NOT THINE HAND [UPON THE LAD] to slay him. Then he (Abraham) said to God, "If this be so, I have come here for nothing; let me at least inflict a wound on him and draw some blood from him". God replied, "Neither do thou anything (מאומה) to him" — inflict no blemish (מום) on him (Genesis Rabbah 56:7).

22:12 FOR NOW I KNOW—R. Aba said: Abraham said to God, "I will lay my complaint before you. Yesterday (on an earlier occasion) you told me, (Genesis 21:12) "In Isaac shall seed be called to thee", and then again you said, (Genesis 21:2) "Take now thy son". Now you tell me, "Lay not thy hand upon the lad"! The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, in the words of Psalms 89:35, "My covenant will I not profane, nor alter that which is gone out of My lips". When I told you, "Take thy son", I was not altering that which went out from My lips, namely, My promise that you would have descendants through Isaac. I did not tell you "Slay him" but bring him up to the mountain. You have brought him up — take him down again" (Genesis Rabbah 56:8).

22:12 FOR NOW I KNOW — From now I have a reply to give to Satan and to the nations who wonder at the love I bear you: I have an opening of the mouth (i.e. I have an excuse, a reason to give them) now that they see that you are a God-fearing man (Genesis Rabbah 56:7).

יגוַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אַיִל אַחַר נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבַךְ בְּקַרְנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאַיִל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ׃

13 When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.

ידוַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא יְהוָה | יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֵאָמֵר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יֵרָאֶה׃

14 And Abraham named that site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the LORD there is vision.”

טוַיִּקְרָא מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שֵׁנִית מִן־הַשָּׁמָיִם׃

15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,

טזוַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־יְהוָה כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידֶךָ׃

16 and said, “By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,

יזכִּי־בָרֵךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָ וְהַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֵת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו׃

17 I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.

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13 Abraham lifted his eyes and saw that behold, there was a ram after it had been caught in the thicket by its horns. Rams, even those with long horns, are typically able to avoid being caught in thickets. Furthermore, this ram was in unusually close proximity to humans. Abraham immediately understood that this was no coincidence, but a sign. Therefore, **Abraham went, took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place** where this occurred: **The Lord will see, as it is said to this day** with regard to that mountain: **On the mount where the Lord will be seen. 15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from the heavens. 16 He said: By Myself I have taken an oath – the utterance of the Lord – for because you have done this thing, and did not withhold your son, your only one, 17 for that I will bless you and multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens and as the sand that is upon the seashore, and your descendants shall inherit the gate of their enemies;**

SELECTED RASHI

22:13 IN THE STEAD OF HIS SON — Since it is written, “He offered it up for a burnt offering”, surely nothing is missing in the text; what then is the force of “in the stead of his son”? At every sacrificial act he performed on it he prayed saying, “May it be Thy will that this act may be regarded as having been done to my son — as though my son is being slain; as though his blood is being sprinkled; as though his skin were being flayed; as though he is being burnt and is being reduced to ashes” (Genesis Rabbah 56:9).

22:14 ה יראה Its real meaning is as the Targum renders it: The Lord will choose and select for Himself this place to make His Shechinah reside in it and for sacrifices to be offered there.

22:14 AS IT IS SAID TO THIS DAY — In the generations to come people will say of it,” On this mountain the Holy One, blessed be He, shows Himself to His people.”

22:14 THIS DAY — the future days, with the same meaning as עד היום הזה “even until this day” wherever it occurs in the entire Scriptures: that all future generations who read this passage will refer the phrase “even unto this day” to the day in which they live. The Midrashic explanation is: May God see this Binding of Isaac every year to forgive Israel and to save them from punishment, so that it may be said “in this day” — in all future generations — “there are seen in the mountain of the Lord” the ashes of Isaac heaped up as it were and serving as a means of atonement (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 23).

יחוְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְזַרְעֲךָ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עֵקֶב אֲשֶׁר
שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקֹלִי׃

[18] All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command."

יטוַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו וַיָּקֻמוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו
אֶל־בְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּשֶׁב אַבְרָהָם בִּבְאֵר שָׁבַע׃

[19] Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.



THE READING · GENESIS 22:20–24

מפטיר
Maftir

Maftir repeats the closing verses of the Seventh Aliyah. AI SUMMARY

כוַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיֻּגַּד לְאַבְרָהָם
לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה יָלְדָה מִלְכָּה גַּם־הִוא בָּנִים לְנָחוֹר
אָחִיךָ׃

[20] Some time later, Abraham was told, "Milcah too has borne children to your brother Nahor:

כאאֶת־עוּץ בְּכֹרוֹ וְאֶת־בּוּז אָחִיו וְאֶת־קְמוּאֵל
אֲבִי אֲרָם׃

[21] Uz the first-born, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram;

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[18] **and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants,** meaning that they will bless each other with the prayer that they be like your descendants, **since you heeded My voice.** [19] **Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived** for some years more **in Beersheba.** [20] **It was after these matters that it was told to Abraham, saying: Behold, Milka,** wife of Nahor, **she too has borne children to your brother Nahor.** This particular form of the word "after" indicates that considerable time had passed between the two events. The news reached Abraham from Haran, on the border of modern-day Turkey and Syria, where Nahor and his family lived. [21] Nahor fathered several sons: **Utz,** with a traditional Aramaic name, who was **his firstborn, Buz his brother, and Kemuel, father of Aram,** who was apparently an important Aramean leader. Apart from Abraham, Terah's descendants became Arameans.

SELECTED RASHI

22:20 AFTER THESE THINGS [IT WAS TOLD ABRAHAM] etc. — When he returned from Mount Moriah Abraham was pondering and he said, "If my son had really been slain, he would have died without children! I must marry him to one of the daughters of Aner or Eshcol or Mamre". The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore had the announcement made to him that Rebecca, the one fit to be his (Isaac's) consort, had been born. This is what is meant by "after these things or words" — namely, "after the words" that expressed the thoughts aroused by the Binding of Isaac (Genesis Rabbah 57:3).

כב וְאֶת־כֶּשֶׂד וְאֶת־חֲזוֹ וְאֶת־פִּלְדָּשׁ וְאֶת־יִדְלָף
וְאֵת בְּתוּאֵל:

22 and Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel”—

כג וּבְתוּאֵל יָלַד אֶת־רִבְקָה שְׁמֹנָה אֵלֶּה יָלְדָה
מִלְכָּה לְנָחוֹר אֲחִי אַבְרָהָם:

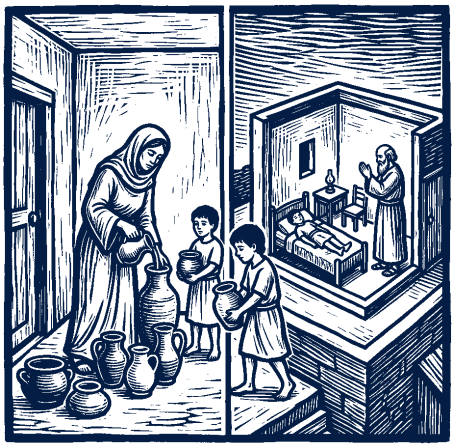
23 Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother.

כד וּפִילַגְשׁוֹ וּשְׁמָהּ רְאוּמָה וַתֵּלֶד גַּם־הִוא אֶת־
טֶבַח וְאֶת־גַּחַם וְאֶת־תַּחַשׁ וְאֶת־מַעֲכָה:

24 And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

22 **Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Yidlaf, and Betuel,** Nahor’s youngest son. 23 **Betuel begot Rebecca.** He had other children as well, and the Torah later introduces his son Laban, who was older than Rebecca. Nevertheless, in this context the birth of Rebecca is of more significance, as she will marry Isaac. At this point Abraham knew that there was at least one woman in the family eligible for Isaac, and he may have had Rebecca in mind when he later sent a messenger to Haran to seek a wife for his son (chap. 24). **These eight** sons **Milka bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother.** 24 **And his,** Nahor’s, **concubine, and her name was Re’uma, she too bore** sons: **Tevah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maakha.**



HAFTARAH · II KINGS 4:1-37

הפטרה

Haftarah

A widow whose husband, a disciple of the prophets, has died is told by Elisha to borrow many empty vessels and pour her single jug of oil into them until all are full, and the oil then pays her debt so she and her sons can live on the rest. Later, a woman of Shunem who has no son is promised one by Elisha, and when the boy dies, she brings him to Elisha, who prays to God, lies over the child, and restores him to life as the boy sneezes seven times and opens his eyes. AI SUMMARY

א וְאִשָּׁה אַחַת מִנְּשֵׁי בְנֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים צָעֲקָה אֶל־
אֱלִישָׁע לֵאמֹר עַבְדְּךָ אִישִׁי מֵת וְאַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ
כִּי עַבְדְּךָ הָיָה יָרֵא אֶת־יְהוָה וְהַנֹּשֶׁה בָּא
לָקַחַת אֶת־שְׁנֵי יְלָדַי לוֹ לַעֲבָדִים׃

[1] A certain woman, the wife of one of the disciples of the prophets, cried out to Elisha: "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know how your servant revered the LORD. And now a creditor is coming to seize my two children as slaves."

ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ אֱלִישָׁע מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ הַגִּידִי
לִי מַה־יֶּשׁ־[לָךְ] (לכי) בַּבָּיִת וַתֹּאמֶר אֵין
לְשִׁפְחָתְךָ כֹל בַּבַּיִת כִּי אִם־אָסוּךְ שָׁמֶן׃

[2] Elisha said to her, "What can I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house?" She replied, "Your maidservant has nothing at all in the house, except a jug of oil."

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[1] **A certain woman of the wives of the disciples of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying: Your servant, my husband, is dead;** he was either Elisha's disciple or this is simply an expression of respect. **And you know that your servant feared the Lord.** However, he left behind heavy debts and I am left without a source of income, **and** now **the creditor is coming to take my two children for himself as slaves.** It was common practice at the time to take the children of a debtor as slaves in lieu of payment, despite the fact that this is not in accordance with Torah law. [2] **Elisha said to her: What shall I do for you? Tell me; what do you have in the house**? **She said: Your maidservant does not have anything in the house, except for a** small **flask of oil** used for anointing. After all, she would only have come to the point where her children would be taken from her after selling everything she owned.

RASHI

4:1 A wife of one of the disciples of the prophets. She was the wife of Ovadyoh. Every expression of 'בְּנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים' [lit., "the sons of the prophets"], in Scripture, is translated [by Targum Yonoson] as, "the disciples of the prophets."

4:1 Now the creditor. He was Yehorom, son of Achov, who would lend him with interest, enabling him to sustain the prophets in his father's time [according to] Midrash Rabbi Tanchuma. Therefore it is stated, "And struck Yehorom between his arms," which he stretched out to take interest.

4:2 A jar of oil. Enough oil for anointment [=אָסוּךְ], and the 'א' is part of the root, like the 'א' of, "and my speech [=וְאַחֲוָתִי] in your ears," and the 'א' of, "the dread [=אִבְחַת] of those struck down by the sword."

ג וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי שַׁאֲלִי־לָךְ כֵּלִים מִן־הַחוּץ מֵאֵת כָּל־[שְׁכֵנָיִךְ] (שכנכי) כֵּלִים רֵקִים אַל־תַּמְעִיטִי׃

3 "Go," he said, "and borrow vessels outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels, as many as you can.

ד וּבָאת וְסָגַרְתְּ הַדֶּלֶת בַּעֲדֵךְ וּבְעַד־בָּנַיִךְ וְיָצַקְתְּ עַל כָּל־הַכֵּלִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהַמָּלֵא תַּסִּיעִי׃

4 Then go in and shut the door behind you and your children, and pour [oil] into all those vessels, removing each one as it is filled."

ה וַתֵּלֶךְ מֵאִתּוֹ וַתִּסְגֹּר הַדֶּלֶת בַּעֲדָהּ וּבְעַד בָּנֶיהָ הֵם מַגִּישִׁים אֵלֶיהָ וְהִיא (מיצקת) [מוֹצֶקֶת]׃

5 She went away and shut the door behind her and her children. They kept bringing [vessels] to her and she kept pouring.

ו וַיְהִי | כִּמְלֹאת הַכֵּלִים וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־בְּנָהּ הַגִּישָׁה אֵלַי עוֹד כֶּלִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ אֵין עוֹד כֶּלִי וַיַּעֲמֹד הַשָּׁמֶן׃

6 When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." He answered her, "There are no more vessels"; and the oil stopped.

ז וַתָּבֹא וַתַּגֶּד לְאִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי מִכְרִי אֶת־הַשֶּׁמֶן וְשַׁלְּמִי אֶת־[נִשְׁיֵךְ] (נשיכי) וְאַתְּ (בניכי) [וּבָנַיִךְ] תִּחְיֵי בַּנּוֹתָר׃

7 She came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your children can live on the rest."

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

3 **He said: Go, borrow vessels for you from the outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels; do not skimp,** but take as many as you can. 4 **You shall enter and shut the door on you and on your sons,** as it is fitting to perform miracles such as this in private, **and pour** the oil in the flask **into all those vessels, and that which is full, move aside.** Once you have filled one vessel, move it aside for the next one. The oil will continue to flow until all the vessels are full. 5 **She left him and shut the door on herself and on her sons; they would hand** vessels **to her, and she would pour** the oil. 6 **It was when the vessels were** all **full that she said to her son: Hand me another vessel; he said to her: There is no other vessel, and** only then **the oil stopped.** The oil had miraculously increased in an amount that corresponded precisely with the number of vessels she possessed and the volume of liquid they could hold. 7 **She came and told the man of God** about the miracle, and asked him what to do next. **And he said: Go, sell the oil and pay your debt** with some of the money you receive for the oil, **and you and your sons shall live on the remainder** of the money. Alternatively, he told her that she should pay her debts with the money she received from selling the oil in the vessels she had borrowed, and that she would continue to be able to miraculously pour oil from the original flask into other vessels so that she could support herself and her sons.

RASHI

4:4 And close the door. [It affords] respect to the miracle [if] it comes about in secret.

4:4 And the full one[s] you shall remove. From before you, and you shall place another vessel in its place to fill it, but you must not move the jug of oil from its place, for the Holy One, Blessed Is He, is making it as a spring, and it is not customary to move a spring from its place. I heard this Midrash Aggadah.

4:5 They would bring [the containers] to her. The vessels.

4:6 Then the oil stopped. From coming anymore. [According to] Midrash Aggadah, the price of oil went up.

4:7 She came and told, etc. She came for advice, whether to sell [the oil] or to wait until it would become even more expensive. He said to her, "Go sell, for there is enough [to pay] all your debt, and for you and your sons to live with the remainder, until the dead are resurrected."

הפטרה

ח וַיְהִי֙ הַיּ֔וֹם וַיַּעֲבֹ֥ר אֱלִישָׁ֖ע אֶל־שׁוּנֵ֑ם וְשָׁ֣ם
אִשָּׁ֤ה גְדוֹלָה֙ וַתַּחֲזֶק־בּ֣וֹ לֶאֱכָל־לָ֔חֶם וְיִהְי֕ מִדֵּ֥י
עָבְרוֹ֖ יָסֵ֣ר שָׁ֑מָּה לֶאֱכָל־לָֽחֶם׃

[8] One day Elisha visited Shunem. A wealthy woman lived there, and she urged him to have a meal; and whenever he passed by, he would stop there for a meal.

ט וַתֹּ֣אמֶר֮ אֶל־אִישָׁהּ֒ הִנֵּה־נָ֣א יָדַ֔עְתִּי כִּ֣י אִ֤ישׁ
אֱלֹהִים֙ קָד֣וֹשׁ ה֔וּא עֹבֵ֥ר עָלֵ֖ינוּ תָּמִֽיד׃

[9] Once she said to her husband, "I am sure it is a holy man of God who comes this way regularly.

י נַֽעֲשֶׂה־נָּ֞א עֲלִיַּת־קִ֣יר קְטַנָּ֗ה וְנָשִׂ֨ים לּ֜וֹ שָׁ֣ם
מִטָּ֣ה וְשֻׁלְחָ֗ן וְכִסֵּא֙ וּמְנוֹרָ֔ה וְהָיָ֕ה בְּבֹא֥וֹ אֵלֵ֖ינוּ
יָסֽוּר שָׁמָּה׃

[10] Let us make a small enclosed upper chamber and place a bed, a table, a chair, and a lampstand there for him, so that he can stop there whenever he comes to us."

יא וַיְהִ֤י הַיּוֹם֙ וַיָּבֹ֣א שָׁמָּ֔ה וַיָּ֖סָר אֶל־הָעֲלִיָּ֑ה
וַיִּשְׁכַּב־שָׁמָּֽה׃

[11] One day he came there; he retired to the upper chamber and lay down there.

יב וַיֹּ֣אמֶר֮ אֶל־גֵּיחֲזִי֒ נַעֲר֣וֹ קְרָ֔א לַשּׁוּנַמִּ֖ית הַזֹּ֑את
וַיִּקְרָא־לָ֖הּ וַתַּעֲמֹ֥ד לְפָנָֽיו׃

[12] He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call that Shunammite woman." He called her, and she stood before him.

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[8] **There was one day that Elisha traveled to Shunem,** generally identified as a place in the Yizre'el Valley, in the territory of Issachar; **there was a great woman there,** a wealthy and noble woman, **and** seeing that such an important visitor had arrived, **she implored him to eat bread** at her house. **So it was that whenever he passed** by, whenever Elisha stopped in Shunem, **he would turn aside there,** to her house, **to eat bread.** [9] **She said to her husband: Behold now, I know that he is a holy man of God, who visits us regularly.** [10] Since he honors us by staying at our home, **please, let us prepare a small loft, and** we will set up a private room for his convenience. We will **place there a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp for him,** items required by a guest; and **it shall be that whenever he comes to us, he will turn aside there.** [11] **There was one day that he came there, and he turned aside to the loft** that they had prepared for him **and** he **lay down there.** [12] **He said to Gehazi his lad: Summon that Shunamite woman. He,** Gehazi, **summoned her, and she stood before him.**

RASHI

4:8 There [lived] a prominent woman. [I.e.,] an important [woman]. And I saw in Pirkei of Rabbi Eliezer, that she was the sister of Avishag the Shunamis.

4:8 Thereafter, whenever he passed through. In that city, he would stop at her house to eat a meal.

4:8 He would go. [יור is] the present tense, [i.e.,] he would go there.

4:9 "Behold, now I know." Because she never saw a fly at his table or semen on his sheet.

4:11 And the day came. And it was one day.

13 He said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. What can we do for you? Can we speak in your behalf to the king or to the army commander?'" She replied, "I live among my own people."

יג וַיֹּ֤אמֶר לוֹ֙ אֱמָר־נָ֣א אֵלֶ֔יהָ הִנֵּ֥ה חָרַ֖דְתְּ | אֵלֵ֑ינוּ
אֶת־כָּל־הַחֲרָדָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את מֶ֥ה לַעֲשׂ֖וֹת לָ֑ךְ הֲיֵ֣שׁ
לְדַבֶּר־לָ֗ךְ אֶל־הַמֶּ֙לֶךְ֙ אוֹ֙ אֶל־שַׂ֣ר הַצָּבָ֔א וַתֹּ֖אמֶר
בְּתוֹךְ֙ עַמִּ֣י אָנֹכִ֔י יֹשָׁבֶ֖ת׃

14 "What then can be done for her?" he asked. "The fact is," said Gehazi, "she has no son, and her husband is old."

יד וַיֹּ֕אמֶר וּמֶ֥ה לַעֲשׂ֖וֹת לָ֑הּ וַיֹּ֣אמֶר גֵּיחֲזִ֔י אֲבָ֥ל
בֵּ֖ן אָ֣יִן לָ֑הּ וְאִישָׁ֖הּ זָקֵֽן׃

15 "Call her," he said. He called her, and she stood in the doorway.

טו וַיֹּ֣אמֶר קְרָא־לָ֔הּ וַיִּקְרָא־לָ֖הּ וַתַּעֲמֹ֥ד בַּפָּֽתַח׃

16 And Elisha said, "At this season next year, you will be embracing a son." She replied, "Please, my lord, man of God, do not delude your maidservant."

טז וַיֹּ֣אמֶר לַמּוֹעֵ֣ד הַזֶּ֔ה כָּעֵ֥ת חַיָּ֖ה (אתי) [אַתְּ]
חֹבֶקֶ֣ת בֵּ֑ן וַתֹּ֗אמֶר אַל־אֲדֹנִי֙ אִ֣ישׁ הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים אַל־
תְּכַזֵּ֖ב בְּשִׁפְחָתֶֽךָ׃

17 The woman conceived and bore a son at the same season the following year, as Elisha had assured her.

יז וַתַּ֣הַר הָאִשָּׁ֔ה וַתֵּ֖לֶד בֵּ֑ן לַמּוֹעֵ֣ד הַזֶּ֔ה כָּעֵ֥ת חַיָּ֖ה
אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּ֥ר אֵלֶ֖יהָ אֱלִישָֽׁע׃

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

13 **He,** Elisha, **said to him,** Gehazi: **Please say to her: Behold, you have taken all this trouble for us;** now, **what may be done for you? Should one speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?** Unlike Elijah, Elisha was not persecuted by the government. On the contrary, he had connections with influential people, which he offered to use on the woman's behalf. **She said** in response: **I dwell among my people.** We are wealthy, our position is secure, and we do not need your political connections. 14 **He,** Elisha, **said** to Gehazi: **What may be done for her** to repay her for all she has done for us? **Gehazi said:** She is indeed rich, **but she does not have a son, and** she cannot wait much longer as **her husband is old,** and his chances of fathering a son are dwindling. It can be assumed that the woman was also not young. 15 **He,** Elisha, **said** to Gehazi: **Summon her. He,** Gehazi, **summoned her, and she stood in the entrance** to Elisha's room. 16 **He,** Elisha, **said: At this time next year, at this very time, you will embrace a son. She said: No, my lord, man of God, do not deceive your maidservant.** Do not give me false expectations. Even if I conceive, I might miscarry, or something could harm the child, God forbid. I do not wish to entertain a hope that will not come to pass. 17 **The woman conceived and bore a son at that time the next year, at that very time, as Elisha had spoken to her,** precisely a year after the prophet's announcement.

RASHI

4:13 You have busied yourself with us. On our account.

4:13 With all this attention. To put your heart into this task, as in, "and shudders [=וחרד] concerning My word," [i.e.,] is diligent concerning the task that it be accomplished, and puts his heart into it.

4:13 What can be done for you? What do you need that we do for you, for you busied yourself on our account.

4:13 "In the midst of my people." Among my relatives, [i.e.,] no one harms me. I have no need for the king or for the general of the army.

4:14 And he said. Elisha [said] to Geichazi.

4:14 "Then what is there to do for her?" To reciprocate for this favor.

4:16 "At this season [next year] when the time comes to give birth." Just as you are alive and well today, so will you be alive at this season [next year] at this time and embracing a son.

4:16 "Do not my master." Do not say, "embracing a son." Why do I need to embrace him if I will end up burying him? This is what she said to him when he died, "Did I not say, 'Do not mislead me'?"

4:16 Do not deceive. Do not show me something that will fail. You have power to beg mercy, so that a son will be given to me. But I beg you, do not give me [any child], rather a child who will live.

4:16 Do not deceive. Like "whose waters will not fail."

4:17 When the time was for her to give birth. Like this time when she was alive and well. Therefore, the word is voweled [to mean], like "this" time.

יחוַיִּגְדַּל הַיָּלֶד וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיֵּצֵא אֶל־אָבִיו אֶל־
הַקֹּצְרִים׃

18 The child grew up. One day, he went out to his father among the reapers.

יטוַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אָבִיו רֹאשִׁי | רֹאשִׁי וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־
הַנַּעַר שָׂאֵהוּ אֶל־אִמּוֹ׃

19 [Suddenly] he cried to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" He said to a servant, "Carry him to his mother."

כוַיִּשָּׂא אֹתוֹ וַיְבִיאֵהוּ אֶל־אִמּוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־בִּרְכֶּיהָ
עַד־הַצָּהֳרַיִם וַיָּמֹת׃

20 He picked him up and brought him to his mother. And the child sat on her lap until noon; and he died.

כאוַתַּעַל וַתַּשְׁכִּבֵהוּ עַל־מִטַּת אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים
וַתִּסְגֹּר בַּעֲדוֹ וַתֵּצֵא׃

21 She took him up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and left him and closed the door.

כבוַתִּקְרָא אֶל־אִישָׁהּ וַתֹּאמֶר שִׁלְחָה נָּא לִי
אֶחָד מִן־הַנְּעָרִים וְאַחַת הָאֲתֹנוֹת וְאָרוּצָה עַד־
אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וְאָשׁוּבָה׃

22 Then she called to her husband: "Please, send me one of the servants and one of the she-asses, so I can hurry to the man of God and back."

כגוַיֹּאמֶר מַדּוּעַ (אתי) [אַתְּ] (הלכתי) [הֹלֶכֶת]
אֵלָיו הַיּוֹם לֹא־חֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא שַׁבָּת וַתֹּאמֶר שָׁלוֹם׃

23 But he said, "Why are you going to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." She answered, "It's all right."

כדוַתַּחֲבֹשׁ הָאָתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־נַעֲרָהּ נְהַג וָלֵךְ
אַל־תַּעֲצָר־לִי לִרְכֹּב כִּי אִם־אָמַרְתִּי לָךְ׃

24 She had the ass saddled, and said to her servant, "Urge [the beast] on; see that I don't slow down unless I tell you."

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

18 **The child grew, and there was one day,** when he was still a young boy, **that he went out to his father,** the owner of the estate, **to the reapers** in the field, to see what they were doing, in the manner of inquisitive children. 19 **He said to his father: My head, my head.** My head hurts me terribly. **He,** the boy's father, **said to his lad: Carry him to his mother.** 20 **He,** the lad, **carried him,** the boy, **and brought him to his mother; he,** the boy, **sat on her knees until noon and** then **died** on her lap, without showing any clear outward signs that he was dead. 21 **She went up** to the loft **and laid him on the bed of the man of God,** Elisha; **she shut the door on him and went out.** 22 **She called her husband and said: Please send me one of the lads** to assist me **and one of the donkeys** to ride, **and I will run to the man of God and** then **return.** 23 **He,** her husband, **said: Why are you going to him today?** After all, **it is not a New Moon and it is not Sabbath** today. It was customary for the disciples and admirers of a great man to visit him on Sabbaths and other special days. **She said: It is well,** everything is fine. She did not want anyone other than the prophet to know about the tragedy. 24 **She saddled the donkey, and she said to her lad: Lead** the donkey **and go; do not stop me from riding,** do not stop on the way, **unless I say to you** that you should stop.

RASHI

4:19 "My head! My head!" I am sick in my head.

4:19 He said. His father said to one of the servants, "Carry him to his mother."

4:24 "Drive and go on." [I.e.,] hurry.

4:24 Do not hold back from riding because of me. Do not hold back the riding [pace] because of me.

כה וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּבֹא אֶל־אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־הַר
הַכַּרְמֶל וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹת אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים אֹתָהּ
מִנֶּגֶד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־גֵּיחֲזִי נַעֲרוֹ הִנֵּה הַשּׁוּנַמִּית
הַלָּז׃

כו עַתָּה רֻוץ־נָא לִקְרָאתָהּ וֶאֱמַר־לָהּ הֲשָׁלוֹם לָךְ
הֲשָׁלוֹם לְאִישֵׁךְ הֲשָׁלוֹם לַיֶּלֶד וַתֹּאמֶר שָׁלוֹם׃

כז וַתָּבֹא אֶל־אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־הָהָר וַתַּחֲזֵק
בְּרַגְלָיו וַיִּגַּשׁ גֵּיחֲזִי לְהָדְפָּהּ וַיֹּאמֶר אִישׁ
הָאֱלֹהִים הַרְפֵּה־לָהּ כִּי־נַפְשָׁהּ מָרָה־לָּהּ וַיהוָה
הֶעְלִים מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא הִגִּיד לִי׃

כח וַתֹּאמֶר הֲשָׁאַלְתִּי בֵן מֵאֵת אֲדֹנִי הֲלֹא
אָמַרְתִּי לֹא תַשְׁלֶה אֹתִי׃

כט וַיֹּאמֶר לְגֵיחֲזִי חֲגֹר מָתְנֶיךָ וְקַח מִשְׁעַנְתִּי
בְיָדְךָ וָלֵךְ כִּי־תִמְצָא אִישׁ לֹא תְבָרְכֶנּוּ וְכִי־
יְבָרֶכְךָ אִישׁ לֹא תַעֲנֶנּוּ וְשַׂמְתָּ מִשְׁעַנְתִּי עַל־
פְּנֵי הַנָּעַר׃

25 She went on until she came to the man of God on Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her from afar, he said to his servant Gehazi, "There is that Shunammite woman.

26 Go, hurry toward her and ask her, 'How are you? How is your husband? How is the child?'" "We are well," she replied.

27 But when she came up to the man of God on the mountain, she clasped his feet. Gehazi stepped forward to push her away; but the man of God said, "Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me."

28 Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Didn't I say: 'Don't mislead me'?"

29 He said to Gehazi, "Tie up your skirts, take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him. And place my staff on the face of the boy."

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

25 **She went, and she came to the man of God, to Mount Carmel,** which was apparently Elisha's place of residence at that time. **It was when the man of God saw her from afar that he said to Gehazi his lad: Behold, it is that Shunamite woman.** 26 There must be an important reason why she has come here on an ordinary weekday. Therefore, **now, run please to meet her, and say to her: Is it well with you, is it well with your husband, is it well with the child?** Ask her if everyone is healthy. **She said** to Gehazi: **It is well.** Once again, she refrained from divulging what had happened.

27 **She came to the man of God to the mountain and grasped his legs,** a gesture of supplication, submission, and acceptance of his authority. **Gehazi approached to push her away,** as he was displeased with the sight of a woman clutching the prophet's legs, **but the man of God said: Let her be, as her soul is bitter within her.** She is clearly anguished, and she should not be reproved for her lack of manners when she is suffering so much; **and the Lord has concealed it,** the cause of her pain, **from me and did not tell me.** Therefore, I do not know what has happened to her.

28 **She said: Did I request a son from my lord?** I did not ask for you to pray for a son on my behalf. I did not anticipate any reward for my actions. Furthermore, **didn't I say: Do not mislead me?** 29 **He said to Gehazi: Gird your loins,** in the manner of a person who is in a hurry to leave, and **take my staff in your hand, and go** to her house; **if you encounter a man** whom you know, **do not greet him, and if a man greets you, do not answer him,** to prevent any delays. And **place my staff on the lad's face.** Since the staff embodied Elisha's power, he hoped it would help the child.

RASHI

4:26 And she said, "[All is] well." This is an abbreviated verse, for it should have been written, "And he asked her, and she said, 'We are well.'"

4:28 Did I not say. To you, "Do not deceive your maidservant"?

4:28 "Do not mislead"? Do not mislead me concerning a mistake.

4:29 Do not greet him. Do not inquire about his welfare. All this [was done] to discourage conversation, where one might ask him, "Where are you going?" and he would say, "To revive the dead." It is not respectful for the miracle when the maker brags about it. But, he did not obey. When anyone asked him [where he was going], he responded, "My master sent me to revive the dead."

30 But the boy's mother said, "As the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you!" So he arose and followed her.

ל וַתֹּאמֶר אֵם הַנַּעַר חַי־יְהוָה וְחֵי־נַפְשְׁךָ אִם־ אֶעֱזָבֶךָּ וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ׃

31 Gehazi had gone on before them and had placed the staff on the boy's face; but there was no sound or response. He turned back to meet him and told him, "The boy has not awakened."

לא וְגֵחֲזִי עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַמִּשְׁעֶנֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַנַּעַר וְאֵין קוֹל וְאֵין קָשֶׁב וַיָּשָׁב לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיַּגֶּד־לוֹ לֵאמֹר לֹא הֵקִיץ הַנָּעַר׃

32 Elisha came into the house, and there was the boy, laid out dead on his couch.

לב וַיָּבֹא אֱלִישָׁע הַבָּיְתָה וְהִנֵּה הַנַּעַר מֵת מֻשְׁכָּב עַל־מִטָּתוֹ׃

33 He went in, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD.

לג וַיָּבֹא וַיִּסְגֹּר הַדֶּלֶת בְּעַד שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־ יְהוָה׃

34 Then he mounted [the bed] and placed himself over the child. He put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes, and his hands on its hands, as he bent over it. And the body of the child became warm.

לד וַיַּעַל וַיִּשְׁכַּב עַל־הַיֶּלֶד וַיָּשֶׂם פִּיו עַל־פִּיו וְעֵינָיו עַל־עֵינָיו וְכַפָּיו עַל־כַּפָּיו וַיִּגְהַר עָלָיו וַיֶּחֱם בְּשַׂר הַיָּלֶד׃

35 He stepped down, walked once up and down the room, then mounted and bent over him. Thereupon, the boy sneezed seven times, and the boy opened his eyes.

לה וַיָּשָׁב וַיֵּלֶךְ בַּבַּיִת אַחַת הֵנָּה וְאַחַת הֵנָּה וַיַּעַל וַיִּגְהַר עָלָיו וַיְזוֹרֶר הַנַּעַר עַד־שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וַיִּפְקַח הַנַּעַר אֶת־עֵינָיו׃

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

30 **The mother of the lad said** to Elisha: **As the Lord lives, and as you live, I will not leave you. He,** Elisha, **rose and followed her.** 31 **Gehazi passed before them,** in accordance with Elisha's command to travel as quickly as possible, **and placed the staff on the lad's face, but there was no sound and no one listening.** The boy did not respond in any manner. **He,** Gehazi, **returned to meet him,** Elisha, **and he,** Gehazi, **told him** what had occurred, **saying: The lad has not awakened.** 32 **Elisha came to the house and behold, the lad was dead, laid on his,** Elisha's **bed.** 33 **He entered** the room **and shut the door on the two of them, and he prayed to the Lord.** He pleaded for resurrection of the dead, the same miracle performed by Elijah. 34 **He went up and lay upon the child; he placed his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his palms on his palms. He stretched himself over him,** or breathed on him, **and the flesh of the child grew warm,** despite the fact that several hours had passed since his death. 35 **He,** Elisha, **went back down, and walked in the house once to, and once fro,** pacing, focused on his devotions to God, **and went up** to the boy's body, **and** again **stretched himself over him; the lad sneezed seven times, and** ultimately, **the lad opened his eyes:** he had been resurrected.

RASHI

4:34 And he spread himself upon him. [Targum] Yonoson rendered 'וְאִלְהֵי עֲלוֹהִי', an expression of weariness. There is a similar word in the Beraisa of Ha'azinu and in Sifrei. But Menachem rendered 'וַיִּגְהַר', an interpretation of the word according to its context, "he prostrated himself upon him."

4:35 [The boy] sneezed. He sneezed.

הפטרה

לו וַיִּקְרָ֣א אֶל־גֵּיחֲזִ֗י וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ קְרָ֣א אֶל־הַשֻּׁנַמִּ֣ית הַזֹּ֔את וַיִּקְרָ֖אֶהָ וַתָּבֹ֣א אֵלָ֑יו וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ שְׂאִ֣י בִנֵּ֔ךְ׃

[36] [Elisha] called Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite woman," and he called her. When she came to him, he said, "Pick up your son."

לז וַתָּבֹ֗א וַתִּפֹּל֙ עַל־רַגְלָ֔יו וַתִּשְׁתַּ֖חוּ אָ֑רְצָה וַתִּשָּׂ֥א אֶת־בְּנָ֖הּ וַתֵּצֵֽא׃

[37] She came and fell at his feet and bowed low to the ground; then she picked up her son and left.

THE STEINSALTZ TANAKH

[36] **He,** Elisha, **called Gehazi, and he said: Summon this Shunamite woman. He,** Gehazi, **summoned her, and she came to him,** Elisha, **and he said: Take up your son.** He is alive. [37] **She entered** Elisha's room, **fell at his feet, and prostrated herself to the ground** in complete submission, **and she took up her son and departed.**



מדרש

Midrash

5 chosen for the booklet

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ON GENESIS 21:26

Real love and real peace both include honest rebuke

Bereshit Rabbah 54:3

Avraham's rebuke of Avimelekh over the stolen well becomes the occasion for two teachings: Rabbi Yosei bar Ḥanina holds that true love must include reprimand (as in Proverbs 9:8), while Reish Lakish holds that true peace likewise requires reprimand. The midrash then clarifies the definition of a gazlan (robber) as one who takes something openly, in public or before a quorum of people, distinguishing him from a thief who acts in secret, and notes that robbery is defined by physically removing an object from another's hand. AI SUMMARY

"Abraham said: I will swear" (Genesis 21:24). "Abraham reprimanded Avimelekh regarding the well of water that Avimelekh's servants had stolen" (Genesis 21:25). "Abraham reprimanded Avimelekh..." – Rabbi Yosei bar Ḥanina said: Reprimand leads to love, as it is stated: "Rebuke a wise person, and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:8). This is consistent with [another] opinion of Rabbi Yosei bar Ḥanina, as he said: Any love that is not accompanied by reprimand is not [true] love. Reish Lakish said: Reprimand leads to peace – "Abraham reprimanded Avimelekh." This is consistent with [another] opinion of his, as he said: Any peace that is not accompanied by reprimand is not [true] peace.

"Regarding the well of water that Avimelekh's servants had stolen [gazlu]" – what is a robber [gazlan]? Bar Kappara said: It is one who steals something in public, as it says: "They robbed everyone who passed them on the road" (Judges 9:25) – just as the road is in public, so, too, robbery is in public. Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai derived it from here: "You brought [as sacrifices] the stolen [gazul] [animal], the lame, and the ill" (Malachi 1:13) – just as lameness and illness are visible, so too, a robber [gazlan] is visible [when he steals]. Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Reish Lakish: [If one steals] in the presence of nine people, he is a thief; in the presence of ten people, he is a robber. Rabbi Tanḥuma in the name of Rabbi Huna: One is not considered a robber until he takes something out of someone's hand, as it is stated: "He stole [vayigzol] the spear from the hand of the Egyptian" (II Samuel 23:21).

"Avimelekh said: I did not know who did this matter, neither did you tell me, nor did I hear of it, other than today" (Genesis 21:26). "Avimelekh said: I did not know...neither did you tell me" – by means of a messenger, "nor did I hear of it, other than today."

ON GENESIS 22:2

Why Jerusalem's name joins two righteous men's names

Bereshit Rabbah 56:10

Jerusalem's name unites the two names given to it: Avraham's "Yireh" and Shem's "Shalem," so that neither righteous man's naming would be slighted, and God combined them into "Yerushalayim." The passage further teaches that Avraham's plea at the Akeidah (Binding of Yitzchak)—that the merit of this act be remembered for his descendants in times of transgression—became bound up with this place, and that the very name Yireh was shown to Avraham to encompass the Beit HaMikdash's (Temple's) three states: built, destroyed, and ultimately rebuilt in glory. AI SUMMARY

“Abraham called the name of that place The Lord will see, as it is said to this day: On the mount where the Lord will be seen” (Genesis 22:14). “Abraham called the name of that place The Lord will see” – Rabbi Yoḥanan said: He said before Him: ‘Master of the universe, when You said to me: “Take you your son, your only one,” I had something to argue in response: Yesterday you said: “For it is through Isaac [that descendants will be considered for you[”...” and now You say: “Take you your son ... [and offer him up]”? (Genesis 22:2). But, God forbid, I did not do so. Rather, I suppressed my mercy to fulfill Your will. May it be Your will, Lord our God, when Isaac’s descendants encounter transgressions and wicked deeds, may this binding [of Isaac] be remembered for them, and may You become filled with mercy towards them.’

Abraham called it [Jerusalem] Yireh, as it is stated: “Abraham called the name of that place The Lord will see [yireh].” Shem called it Shalem, as it is stated: “Malki Tzedek king of Shalem” (Genesis 14:18). The Holy One blessed be He said: ‘If I call it Yireh, as Abraham called it, Shem, a righteous man, will have a complaint. If I call it Shalem, Abraham, a righteous man, will have a complaint. Instead, I shall call it Yerushalayim, as both of them called it, – Yireh, Shalem – Yerushalayim.’

Rabbi Berekhya said in the name of Rabbi Ḥelbo: While it was still called Shalem, the Holy One blessed be made Himself a provisional booth [sukka] and He would pray in it, as it is stated: “His abode [sukko] was in Shalem, His dwelling place in Zion” (Psalms 76:3).

What did He say [in His prayers?] May it be My will that I will see construction of My [permanent] house [here]. Another interpretation, this teaches that the Holy One blessed be He showed him [Abraham] the [future] Temple as built, then destroyed and then built, as it is stated: “The name of that place The Lord will see [yireh]” – that refers to the Temple built, just as it says: “Three times in the year [all your males] shall appear [yeraeh]” (Deuteronomy 16:16).

“As it is said to this day: On the mount where the Lord” – that refers to the Temple destroyed, as it is stated: “On Mount Zion that is desolate” (Lamentations 5:18). “The Lord will be seen” – [that refers to the Temple] built and perfected in the future, like the matter that is stated: “For the Lord has rebuilt Zion and is seen in His glory” (Psalms 102:17).

ON GENESIS 22:2

Why did God ask Abraham to offer Isaac if He never meant for him to die?

Bereshit Rabbah 56:8

Yitzchak himself asks to be bound tightly, fearing that any involuntary movement might invalidate the offering, showing that the Akeidah was an act of his own full consent and devotion, not merely his father's will. Avraham's tears mingle with his joy, reflecting both natural human mercy and complete submission to the Divine will, while the angels protest that Jerusalem's destiny seems endangered. God then clarifies that the command "take him up" never meant "slaughter him," teaching that the real test lay in the act of ascent and willingness itself, not in Yitzchak's actual death. AI SUMMARY

Another matter, Rabbi Yitzḥak said: When Abraham sought to bind Isaac his son, he said to him: ‘Father, I am a young man, and I am concerned that my body will tremble due to fear of the knife, and I will [thereby] upset you, or perhaps the slaughter will [thereby] be rendered unfit and it will not be counted for you as a valid offering. Therefore, bind me very well.’ Thereupon, “he bound Isaac his son.” Is a person capable of binding a thirty-seven- year-old [variant reading: a twenty-six-year-old] without his consent?

Immediately, “Abraham extended his hand.” As he extended his hand to take the knife, his eyes were emitting tears and the tears were falling into Isaac’s eyes, because of the father’s mercy [for his son]. Nevertheless, his heart was joyful in fulfilling the will of his Creator. The angels gathered themselves into groups up above. What did they cry out? “The highways are desolate, those passing on the way have ceased, he breached the covenant, he has spurned the cities” (Isaiah 33:8) – does He not in fact desire Jerusalem, and the Temple that He had planned to bequeath to Isaac’s descendants? “He had no regard for man” (Isaiah 33:8) – if the merit of Abraham is not sufficient, there is no significance for any person before Him.

Rabbi Aḥa said: Abraham began to express his astonishment, [saying to God]: ‘These events are nothing short of bewildering. Yesterday You said: “For it is through Isaac that will be called your descendants” (Genesis 21:12), then You said: “Take you your son [...and offer him up]” (Genesis 22:2), and now You say to me: “Do not extend your hand against the lad”? This is bewildering.’ The Holy One blessed be He said to Abraham: ‘“I will not violate My covenant, nor alter the utterance of My lips” (Psalms 89:35) – when I said to you: “Take you your son,” I did not say: “Slaughter him,” but rather, “take him up.” I said this to you in affection. You have taken him up and fulfilled My words, now take him down.’

<Variant reading: They said a parable; this is analogous to a king who said to his friend: ‘Bring your son up to [eat at] my table.’ He brought him to him, knife in hand. The king said: ‘Did I say to bring him up in order to eat him? I said: Bring him up out of affection for him.’ That is what is written: “[They built altars on which to burn their sons and daughters in fire, something that I never commanded] and which never entered my mind” (Jeremiah 19:5) – this refers to Isaac.>

ON GENESIS 22:12

Yitzchak's soul left him and then returned at the altar

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 31:10

At the moment the blade touched his neck, Yitzchak's soul departed from him, but when the Divine voice called out from between the Keruvim (Cherubim) commanding Avraham to withhold his hand, his soul was restored and he rose to his feet alive. Through this experience Yitzchak perceived, in his own flesh, the future resurrection of the dead, and he responded by blessing God as the One who revives the dead. AI SUMMARY

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. 22:12), 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.

ON GENESIS 21:19

God judges each person by who they are right now

Bereshit Rabbah 53:14

God attends to the tears of the lowly and the stranger as readily as to those of the righteous, as shown by His response to Hagar's weeping over Yishmael. Though the angels protested that Yishmael's descendants would one day bring suffering upon Israel, God judged him "as he is there" — solely by his present righteousness, not by his future deeds, teaching that each person is judged according to who they are now. The well was already present, but Hagar's eyes needed to be opened by God to see it — for all people are presumed blind until God grants them sight — yet her act of filling the skin rather than trusting fully in what she had seen reveals a lingering deficiency in her faith. AI SUMMARY

That is what is written: “You have taken account of my wandering. Put my tears in Your flask [nodekha]” (Psalms 56:9) – [accept my tears] like that woman with the flask [Hagar]. Just as it is written in the book of Psalms: “Hear my prayer, Lord, and heed my cry; [do not be silent at my tears]” (Psalms 39:13) – [David said:] ‘To the tears of Hagar You were not silent, but to my tears You are silent? And if You will say: Because she was a stranger she was beloved, I, too, “for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, like all my fathers”’ (Psalms 39:13).

“God heard the voice of the lad; the angel of God called to Hagar from the heavens, and said to her: What is it with you, Hagar? Fear not, as God has heard the voice of the lad, as he is there” (Genesis 21:17). “The angel of God called to Hagar from the heavens” – due to the merit of Abraham. “As he is there” – due to his own merit; the prayer of an ill person himself is superior to all others.

“As he is there” – Rabbi Simon said: The ministering angels leapt to condemn him before God]. They said before Him: ‘Master of the universe, a person who is destined to kill your children by

thirst, will You produce a spring for him?' He said to them: 'What is he right now, righteous or wicked?' They said to him: 'He is righteous.' He said to them: 'I judge a person only at his present time. "Rise, lift the boy"' (Genesis 21:18).

"God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad to drink" (Genesis 21:19). "God opened her eyes" – Rabbi Binyamin said: Everyone has the presumptive status of being blind until the Holy One blessed be He opens their eyes. [This is derived] from here: "God opened her eyes."

"She went and filled the skin with water" – this teaches that she was lacking in faith.





מפרשים

Classical Commentaries

4 chosen for the booklet

RAMBAN · GENESIS 22:1 — 50
Why did God test Abraham if He knew the outcome?

RAMBAN · GENESIS 18:1 — 52
A vision could confirm, not command, a righteous deed

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Was Yishmael's mocking malicious, or just childish play?

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Did Avraham see angels while awake or dreaming?

RAMBAN

Why did God test Abraham if He knew the outcome?

Genesis 22:1

Ramban understands the "trial" (nisayon) of Akeidat Yitzchak as a positive opportunity: since G-d already knows the righteous will obey, He commands a test so that the person's good intention becomes actualized deed, earning reward for action rather than thought alone—thus all trials in the Torah serve the good of the one tested. Rashbam, by contrast, reads "vayehi achar hadevarim ha'eleh" as referring to the immediately preceding covenant with Avimelech, and understands the nisayon as a painful rebuke (kontrarya)—G-d's way of punishing Avraham for rashly ceding land promised to his descendants, showing him that Yitzchak's survival, and thus the future of that promise, was never guaranteed. The two thus diverge sharply: Ramban sees the trial as constructive and reward-oriented, while Rashbam sees it as corrective and punitive, tied to a specific prior misstep by Avraham. AI SUMMARY

"Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am.""

AND G-D TRIED ABRAHAM. — The matter of "trial," in my opinion, is as follows: Since a man's deeds are at his absolute free command, to perform them or not to perform them at his will, on the part of one who is tried it is called "a trial." But on the part of the One, blessed be He, who tries the person, it is a command that the one being tested should bring forth the matter from the potential into actuality so that he may be rewarded for a good deed, not for a good thought alone. Know further that G-d trieth the righteous, for knowing that the righteous will do His will, He desires to make him even more upright, and so He commands him to undertake a test, but He does not try the wicked, who would not obey. Thus all trials in the Torah are for the good of the one who is being tried.

RASHBAM, WHO READS IT DIFFERENTLY

ויהי אחר הדברים האלה — whenever we find the construction אחר הדברים האלה what follows is conceptually immediately following what has been reported immediately before. Examples are found in 15,1 after Avraham had killed the four kings who had taken Lot captive. At that time G'd had told him not to be afraid of any repercussions. We also find such a construction in verse 20 of our chapter where the Avraham was informed of the birth of Rivkah after we heard that Yitzchok had been born. We find a similar construction also in Esther 3,1 where Mordechai told Esther and she told the king about the assassination plot by Bigtan and Teresh. The event occurred around the time when Haman was promoted and wanted to kill Mordechai and the Jewish people. The fact that he had saved the king's life became the immediate cause of Mordechai's rise in the king's esteem.

[if I understand the author correctly, he wants to tell us that although sequentially the matters related are not immediate chronologically, the Torah or Scriptures use the formulation to trace them to events which occurred some time back. Yitzchok was at least 37 years old before Avraham heard about the birth of Rivkah. Similarly, if the king had rewarded Mordechai for his part in discovering the plot immediately, history might have taken a different course. Ed.

] Here too, the words mean that what follows occurred after Avraham and Avimelech had concluded their covenant according to which until the fourth generation Avraham's descendants would not register a claim against lands owned by the Philistines at this time. G'd became very angry at this high-handed action by Avraham, seeing that he had given away lands which were part of what G'd had promised to Avraham and his descendants at the "covenant of the pieces" in chapter 15. We know that a condition of that covenant had been not to allow a single soul of the Canaanites to survive in that land, according to both Deuteronomy 20,16 as well as according to Joshua 13,3 and 15,45-47.

Clearly lots had been cast concerning the lands owned by the 5 Philistine rulers, and who was to settle in those lands after the conquest. As a result of Avraham's high-handed action,

והאלוקים נסה את אברהם — G'd now subjected Avraham to a painful test, something which was bound to cause him grief. Whenever the root נסה occurs, such as in Job 4,2 or Exodus 17,7 or Psalms 26,2 the connotation is an unpleasant one for the one being subjected to it.

In this instance, G'd, so to speak, indicated to Avraham that he had been foolish to think that he could guarantee's Yitzchok's and his descendants well being into the future, as he might have to terminate his life before he even had produced any offspring who would be called upon to honour his father's deal with Avimelech. We find that the ark of the covenant spent seven months in Philistine captivity as a result of Avraham having made such an unauthorised pact with Avimelech (Samuel I 6,1). The seven months corresponded to the seven sheep Avraham had gratuitously given to Avimelech. G'd swore that as a result the Philistines would fight seven wars against the Israelites in which they would be victorious. These wars occurred during the time of Shimshon, Chofni, Pinchos, Sha-ul, and the three sons of Sha-ul who were killed.

Another approach: as a result of Avraham's high-handed act seven altars (public altars equivalent of temples) were destroyed by the enemies of the Jewish people after they entered the Holy Land Land, They were: Moses' Tabernacle, Gilgal, Nov, Shiloh, Givon and the two Temples in Jesrusalem.

(copied from Midrash Shemuel by the editor of Rash'bam) According to still another version G'd's ark would repose in the land of the Philistines for 7 months.

נסה ה' — the words mean קונטריה, "G'd rebuked Avraham."

RAMBAN

A vision could confirm, not command, a righteous deed

Genesis 18:1

Ramban reads the divine appearance as a true vision of the Shechinah (Divine Presence), granted to Avraham as a reward and sign of divine approval for having performed the mitzvah (commandment) of brit milah (circumcision), not as a vehicle for any new command—paralleling other cases where the righteous merit seeing angels or G-d's glory simply as confirmation that their deeds found favor; he also sharply rejects the Rambam's view (via Ibn Ezra's citation of the Moreh Nevuchim) that the whole episode, including the angels' eating and the Sodom narrative, was merely a prophetic dream, insisting instead that angels appearing as "men" reflects a real, if special, created glory perceptible to the pure of heart. Rashbam, by contrast, treats the appearance simply as the arrival of the three angel-messengers themselves (who are peshat-level called "Hashem" as G-d's agents, as elsewhere in Scripture), and explains "the heat of the day" not theologically but practically—it clarifies why Avraham offered only light refreshment rather than overnight lodging as Lot later did, since midday travelers would not be expected to need a place to sleep. AI SUMMARY

"The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot."

AND HE APPEARED TO HIM. — Rashi comments: "To visit the sick man. Said Rabbi Chama the son of Chanina, 'It was the third day after his circumcision, and the Holy One, blessed be He, came and inquired after him.' And, lo, three men: angels who came to him in the form of men. Three: one to announce to Sarah that she would bear a son, one to heal Abraham, and one to overthrow Sodom. Raphael who healed Abraham went from there to rescue Lot" for these do not constitute two commissions. This is because the second mission was in another place, and he was commanded thereon after [he had completed his first mission]. Perhaps it is because the two missions had rescue as their common goal. "And they did eat: they appeared to be eating."

In the book Moreh Nebuchim it is said that this portion of Scripture consists of a general statement followed by a detailed description. Thus Scripture first says that the Eternal appeared to Abraham in the form of prophetic visions, and then explains in what manner this vision took place, namely, that he [Abraham] lifted up his eyes in the vision, and lo, three men stood by him, and he said, if now I have found favor in thy eyes. This is the account of what he said in the prophetic vision to one of them, namely, their chief. Now if in the vision there appeared to Abraham only men partaking of food, how then does Scripture say, And the Eternal appeared to him, as G-d did not appear to him in vision or in thought?

Such is not found with respect to all the prophecies. And according to his words, Sarah did not knead cakes, nor did Abraham prepare a bullock, and also, Sarah did not laugh. It was all a vision! If so, this dream came through a multitude of business, like dreams of falsehood, for what is the purpose of showing him all this!

Similarly did the author of the Moreh Nebuchim say in the case of the verse, And a man wrestled with him, that it was all a prophetic vision. But if this be the case, I do not know why Jacob limped on his thigh when he awoke! And why did Jacob say, For I have seen an angel face to face, and my life is preserved? The prophets did not fear that they might die on account of having experienced prophetic visions. Jacob, moreover, had already seen a greater and more distinguished vision than this since many times, in prophetic visions, he had also seen the Revered Divinity.

Now according to this author's opinion, he will find it necessary for the sake of consistency to say similarly in the affair of Lot that the angels did not come to his house, nor did he bake for them unleavened bread and they did eat. Rather, it was all a vision! But if Lot could ascend to the height of a prophetic vision, how did the wicked and sinful people of Sodom become prophets? Who told them that men had come into Lot's house?

And if all these [i.e., the actions of the inhabitants of Sodom], were part of prophetic visions, then it follows that the account related in the verses, And the angels hastened Lot, saying: Arise take thy wife. ...And he said, Escape for thy life... See, I have accepted thee, as well as the entire chapter is but a vision, and if so, Lot could have remained in Sodom! But the author of the Moreh Nebuchim thinks that the events took place of themselves, but the conversations relating to all matters were in a vision! But such words contradict Scripture. It is forbidden to listen to them, all the more to believe in them!

In truth, wherever Scripture mentions an angel being seen or heard speaking it is in a vision or in a dream for the human senses cannot perceive the angels. But these are not visions of prophecy since he who attains the vision of an angel or the hearing of his speech is not yet a prophet. For the matter is not as the Rabbi pronounced, i.e., that every prophet, Moses our teacher excepted, received his prophecy through the medium of an angel. The Sages have already said concerning Daniel: "They were greater than he for they were prophets and he was not a prophet."

His book, likewise, was not grouped together with the books of the prophets since his affair was with the angel Gabriel, even though he appeared to him and spoke with him when he was awake, as it is said in the vision concerning the second Temple: Yea, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel,etc. The vision concerning the ultimate redemption also occurred when Daniel was awake as he walked with his friends beside the Tigris River. Hagar the Egyptian is not included in the group of prophetesses. It is also clear that hers was not a case of the bath kol (prophetic echo), as the Rabbi would have it. Scripture, furthermore, sets apart the prophecy of Moses our teacher from that of the patriarchs, as it is said, And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by [the name of] G-d Almighty, this name being one of the sacred names for the Creator, and not a designation for an angel.

Our Rabbis also taught concerning the difference in the degree of prophecy between Moses and the other prophets, and they said: "What is the difference between Moses and all the prophets? The Rabbis say that all prophets saw through unclear vision. It is to this matter that Scripture refers in saying, And I have multiplied visions, and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes. Moses saw through a clear vision. It is to this matter that Scripture refers in saying, And the similitudes of the Eternal doth he behold," as is explained in Vayikra Rabbah and other places.

But in no place did the Sages attribute the prophecy of the prophets to an angel. Do not expose yourself to argument by quoting the verse, I also am a prophet as thou art; and an angel spoke unto me by the word of the Eternal, saying, since its meaning is as follows: "I also am a prophet as thou art, and I know that the angel who spoke to me was by word of G-d, this being one of the degrees of prophecy, as the man of G-d said, For so was it charged me by the word of the Eternal, and he further said, For it was said to me by the word of the Eternal.

Our Rabbis have further stated in the matter of Balaam, who said, Now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back, [that is as if Balaam commented]: "I did not go [with the messengers of Balak] until the Holy One, blessed be He, told me, Rise up, go with them, and you [i.e., an angel], tell me that I should return. Such is His conduct!

Did He not tell Abraham to sacrifice his son, after which the angel of the Eternal called to Abraham, And he said, Lay not thy hand upon the lad. He is accustomed to saying something and to have an angel revoke it, etc." Thus the Sages were prompted to say that the prophecy comprising the first charge where G-d is mentioned is not like the second charge of which it is said that it was through an angel, only this was not unusual, for it is customary with the

prophets that He would command by a prophecy and revoke the command through an angel since the prophet knew that the revocation was the word of G-d.

In the beginning of Vayikra Rabbah the Sages have said: "And He called to Moses, unlike Abraham. Concerning Abraham it is written, And the angel of the Eternal called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven. The angel called, and G-d spoke the word, but here with respect to Moses, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'It is I Who called, and it is I Who spoke the word.'" That is to say, Abraham did not attain prophecy until he prepared his soul first to perceive an angel, and from that degree he ascended to attain the word of prophecy, but Moses was prepared for prophecy at all times.

Thus the Sages were prompted to inform us everywhere that seeing an angel is not prophecy, and those who see angels and speak with them are not included among the prophets, as I have mentioned concerning Daniel. Rather, this is only a vision called "opening of eyes," as in the verse: And the Eternal opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Eternal; similarly: And Elisha prayed, and said, O Eternal, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. But where Scripture mentions the angels as men, as is the case in this portion, and the portion concerning Lot — likewise, And a man wrestled with him, And a certain man found him, in the opinion of our Rabbis — in all these cases there was a special glory created in the angels, called among those who know the mysteries of the Torah "a garment," perceptible to the human vision of such pure persons as the pious and the disciples of the prophets, and I cannot explain any further. And in those places in Scripture where you find the sight of G-d and the speech of an angel, or the sight of an angel and the speech of G-d, as is written concerning Moses at the outset of his prophecy, and in the words of Zechariah, I will yet disclose words of the living G-d in allusions.

Concerning on the matter of the verse, And they did eat, the Usages have said: "One course after the other disappeared." The matter of "disappearance" you will understand from the account about Manoah, if you will be worthy to attain it. Now here is the interpretation of this portion of Scripture. After it says that In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, Scripture says that G-d appeared to him while he was sick from the circumcision as he was sitting and cooling himself in his tent door on account of the heat of the day which weakened him. Scripture mentions this in order to inform us that Abraham had no intention for prophecy. He had neither fallen on his face nor prayed, yet this vision did come to him.

IN THE OAKS OF MAMRE. — This is to inform us of the place wherein he was circumcised. Now this revelation of the Shechinah (the Divine Presence) came to Abraham as a mark of distinction and honor, even as it is said in connection with the dedication of the Tabernacle, And they [Moses and Aaron] came out, and blessed the people, and the glory of the Eternal appeared unto all the people, as it was on account of their effort in fulfilling the commandment of building the Tabernacle that they merited seeing the Shechinah. Now the revelation of the Shechinah here and there was not at all for the purpose of charging them with some commandment or to impart some communication. Instead, it was a reward for the commandment which had already been performed, and it informed them that their deeds have G-d's approval, even as it says, As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.

Similarly, in connection with Jacob, Scripture says, And the angels of G-d met him, and yet we find no communication there, nor is any new matter conveyed. Instead, the verse only informs us that he merited seeing angels of the Supreme One, and thus he knew that his deeds had His approval. And so it was with Abraham: the seeing of the Shechinah (the Divine Presence) was both merit [for his having performed the commandment of circumcision] and assurance of G-d's approval.

Similarly did the Sages say of those who passed through the Red Sea and said, This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him: "A handmaid saw at the sea what Ezekiel the prophet never saw." This they merited at the time of the great miracle because they believed in the Eternal, and in Moses his servant.

At times the appearance of the Shechinah comes in a moment of anger, as mentioned in the verse: And the whole congregation bade stone them with stones, when the glory of the Eternal appeared in the tent of meeting unto all the children of Israel. That was for the protection of His righteous servants and their honor.

Now do not be concerned about the interruption of the portion since the subject is after all connected. It is for this reason that the verse says, And He appeared to him, and it does not say, "And the Eternal appeared to Abraham." But in this present chapter Scripture wishes to give an account of the honor that was bestowed upon him [Abraham] at the time he performed the circumcision, and it tells that the Shechinah appeared to him and sent him His angels to inform his wife [that she would give birth to a son], and also to save his relative Lot on his account. Abraham had already been informed by the Shechinah concerning the birth of a son, and Sarah was now informed by word of the angel who spoke with Abraham in order that Sarah should hear, even as it says, And Sarah heard.

This is the intent of the Sages' saying, "G-d came to visit the sick man," meaning that it was not for the purpose of some utterance but as a mark of honor to him. They have also said, "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me. Now if any person just built an altar to My name, he is assured that I will appear unto him and bless him. All the more is such assurance given to Abraham who circumcised himself for My name."

It is possible that the Sages may have further intended to say [by their remark, "He came to visit the sick man,"] that the vision of the Shechinah was a cure for his sickness on account of the circumcision, for so it should be, as it is written, In the light of the King's countenance is life.

RASHBAM, WHO READS IT DIFFERENTLY

וירא אליו ה — In what manner did G'd appear to Avraham here? Three men, who turned out to be angels came to him. There are numerous examples in Scripture where the angels or a single angel are described as "G'd", i.e. seeing they are G'd's agents they are described as ה', even though what is meant is an agent, an angel. To mention just one or two such examples: Exodus 23,21 כי שמי בקרבו, "because My Holy Name is within him." Or, Exodus 3 3,2 וירא אליו מלאך ה' בלבת אש מתוך הסנה, "an angel of Hashem appeared to him in the form of a flame of fire in the midst of the thorn bush." [the unusual fire which failed to consume, destroy, the thorn bush represented a Divine appearance. Ed.] Or, in verse 4 of the same chapter: וירא ה' כי סר לראות, "when G'd (i.e. the angel) saw that he had turned aside to watch the spectacle."

כחום היום — why would the Torah need to relate this apparently inconsequential piece of information (so that we read it aloud every week after over 3000 years)? The point the Torah wanted to make was that in the event that we compare Lot's reception of the angels, when he offered them lodging for the night, (Genesis 19,1) whereas Avraham only offered light refreshment, the reason for this is that the angels came to Lot in the evening, a time for travelers to find lodging, whereas here, seeing that they arrived during the midday heat, there was no reason to assume that they would not want to continue their journey.

SFORNO

Was Yishmael's mocking malicious, or just childish play?

Genesis 21:9

Sforno attributes Yishmael's mocking to the negative influence of his mother Hagar, the Egyptian, reasoning that since Avraham never spoke disparagingly, the boy must have absorbed such talk from Hagar; his taunt specifically repeated gossip suggesting Yitzchak was really Avimelech's son, gossip he only later overheard. Ibn Ezra, by contrast, sees nothing sinister in Yishmael's behavior, viewing it as ordinary childish playfulness, and attributes Sarah's reaction instead to her jealousy over Yishmael being the elder son. Thus the two differ on whether Yishmael's "playing" reflected malicious intent rooted in his upbringing, or simply normal child's play misread through Sarah's jealousy. AI SUMMARY

"Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing."

את בן הגר המצרית — she assumed that the reason Ishmael had made disparaging remarks about Yitzchok was due to his mother putting him up to it, or to the Egyptian genes of his mother coming into play here. We have a saying in Sukkah 56 that the prattle of children in public reflects either what they picked up from their father or what they picked up from their mother. In the case of Ishmael, he certainly did not overhear his father make such disparaging remarks.

מצחק — making fun of the big party Avraham had given to mark the weaning of Yitzchok, He claimed that surely Sarah must have become pregnant from Avimelech. The reason he had not made such remarks already at the time when Yitzchok had been born, was because he had only overheard wicked gossip about this at a later stage, and now he repeated what he had heard.

IBN EZRA, WHO READS IT DIFFERENTLY

MAKING SPORT. — Ishmael was acting as a boy is wont to act. Sarah was jealous because he was older than her son.

SFORNO

Did Avraham see angels while awake or dreaming?

Genesis 18:2

Sforno understands Avraham's encounter as a waking event: the three men genuinely appeared before him, standing in evident readiness to address him, and their awe-inspiring bearing led him to run and bow as one would before emissaries of a king, interrupting his attention from G-d's revelation to attend to them. Radak, by contrast, reads the episode as occurring within a vision during sleep, in which Avraham saw himself rising and running toward these impressive figures; he further notes, citing Bereshit Rabbah, that Avraham's spiritual stature allowed him to perceive the visitors simply as human men, unlike Lot or Manoach's wife, whose lesser spiritual sensitivity caused them to recognize such visitors as malachim (angels). Both commentators thus explore the nature of Avraham's perception, differing on whether the scene was literal or visionary. AI SUMMARY

"Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground,"

וישא עיניו — he concentrated on seeing more clearly.

נצבים עלי — facing him. They appeared as if waiting to speak to him when he would be free to turn his attention from the marvelous manifestation he had just observed. People waiting to speak to someone are described as נצבים עליו, as for instance in Genesis 45,1 להתאפק לכל הנצבים עליו.

וירץ לקראתם — before they could open a dialogue with him.

מפתח האהל — he began running from the entrance of his tent. When a person is observed to perform any task with speed, with keenness, this reflects that he considers what he is about to do as important. We have another example of such conduct in Exodus 34,8 וימהר משה ויקוד ארצה וישתחו, "Moses hastened to bow down and to prostrate himself."

וישתחו ארצה — seeing that the appearance of these strangers was so awe-inspiring. We have a parallel verse in Judges 13,6 when Manoach's wife is described as reacting to the angel's awe-inspiring appearance as such that she did not even dare to enquire his name, etc. Avraham considered these men as emissaries from some king.

RADAK, WHO READS IT DIFFERENTLY

וישא את עיניו — the first thing Avraham saw after he had gone to sleep were three men standing next to him, נצבים עליו, apparently ready to be of service to him. The meaning of the expression נצבים עליו is similar to Samuel I 22,7 ויאמר שאול לעבדיו הנצבים עליו, "Saul said to the people standing next to him (in attendance) etc." The same expression is also used in this context in Ruth 2,6 הנצב על הקוצרים, "who was standing next to the reapers;" we also find this expression in Kings I 5,30 "משרי הנצבים, and in numerous other places in Scripture. These three men beheld by Avraham were standing at his disposal. They did not move, but indicated that they were expecting instructions from him. When he realised this he ran toward them. This explains why the word וירא, "he saw" appears twice in this verse in close succession.

מפתח האהל — where he had been sitting. He saw himself running towards these men in his vision.

וישתחו ארצה — they appeared to him to be men of great stature. He then addressed them with the words reported in the Torah. Our sages (Bereshit Rabbah 50,2) say that Avraham was so familiar with the sight of angels that their sudden appearance did not cause him to become disoriented, frightened and he perceived them essentially as אנשים, men. On the other hand, Lot, whose spiritual powers were quite

minor, perceived the men as being angels, מלאכים, seeing that he had had little experience with such phenomena. (compare 19,1) Manoach's wife had already told her husband that the face of the man who had told her that she would have a son was like that of an angel of G'd. (Judges 13,6)





חסידות

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Why does God personally go down to see the sinners of Sodom?

APTA · OHEV YISRAEL, VAYERA

Why did God appear to Avraham while he sat at the tent entrance?

Ohev Yisrael

Avraham's humility led him to feel unworthy of the Shechinah's resting presence, so that even in his own heart he saw himself as still standing at the entrance of the tent while Mamre alone received the Divine Presence. The author presents this as the constant experience of the tzaddikim, who serve God all their days yet feel they have not yet begun. AI SUMMARY

"Hashem appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre." The explanation is that our father Avraham, peace be upon him, was so humble in his own eyes that he thought in his heart that he himself was unworthy of the resting of the Shechinah (the Divine Presence). Only Mamre, the tzaddik (righteous one) who serves Hashem, may He be blessed, was worthy, and the resting of His Shechinah, may He be blessed, was with him. Avraham himself had not yet reached this level. This is the meaning of "appeared to him": that is to say, this is how it always appeared to him in his heart and thoughts.

"Hashem by the terebinths of Mamre" means that Hashem was by the terebinths of Mamre. That is, the resting of His Shechinah, may He be blessed, was only with Mamre, because he was a tzaddik who served Hashem, may He be blessed, in truth, while Avraham was still outside and had not entered into holiness. This is the meaning of "and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent": in his thoughts he was still at the entrance of the tent of holiness.

This is also the way of the tzaddikim. Even though they serve Hashem all their days, nevertheless it truly seems to them, in their hearts and thoughts, that they have not yet begun to serve Hashem, may He be blessed, at all. They are still outside the tent of holiness, standing only at the entrance of the tent.

And the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious. With this the question of the Or HaChayim is resolved; see there.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)

Why does God set a constant inner struggle within us?

Beit Yisrael

Drawing on the Sages' teaching that whoever is greater than his fellow has a greater yetzer hara (evil inclination), the author explains that God arranged a constant inner struggle so that a person can serve Him, and that the remedy, based on the verse "I have set God before me always," is to hold to faith in God beyond one's own comprehension when the yetzer rises. Drawing on the Zohar, the author adds that when a person turns from evil and does good, God joins the mitzvot to His Name and purifies the deed, and that a person who recognizes his fervor as God's gift will be helped to serve God with love and yirah (awe). AI SUMMARY

"And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." I say: It is written, "I have set Hashem before me always." The matter is this: God made the one opposite the other (zeh le'umat zeh), "a wise heart at his right and a foolish heart at his left." As our Sages of blessed memory said, whoever is greater than his fellow, his yetzer hara (evil inclination) is greater than his. It is also taught that every day a person's yetzer overpowers him, etc. Hashem made this too for the good, for a constant delight is no delight. Therefore Hashem made it that a person would have a struggle with the yetzer in his avodah (divine service) of Him, yitbarach (may He be blessed).

The counsel for this is "I have set Hashem before me always." That is, always to place the aforementioned before him, in opposition, and to believe in Hashem truly, beyond one's own comprehension. For the yetzer can overpower a person's comprehension, but it cannot overpower faith in Hashem that is truly beyond comprehension. This is "I have set Hashem before me always": when a person is in opposition, when the yetzer is overpowering him, then the mitzvah (commandment) is to place Hashem in that opposition and to believe that "the whole earth is full of His glory." That is the Name Havayah, the Name of mercy, which is above comprehension, and there the yetzer has no dominion at all.

I say: When a person does this and turns from evil, then it is possible for him to do good, to serve Hashem in everything, to engage in Torah, and to bind himself to Hashem. For HaKadosh Baruch Hu (the Holy One, blessed be He), the Torah, and Israel are one, and the mitzvot too are one with Hashem. As it is written, "In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you," which the Targum renders, "In every place where I cause My Shechinah (the Divine Presence) to dwell within it, I will come to you and bless you." And the Zohar HaKadosh states: "My name" (shemi) with Yud-Heh is 365, and "My remembrance" (zichri) with Vav-Heh is 248. These are the 613 mitzvot, and they are united with the Name Havayah, the Name of mercy. This is "do good": to serve Hashem, to engage in Torah and the mitzvot.

Sometimes a person performs a mitzvah as "a commandment of men learned by rote," but his thought is directed to Hashem, a good thought. Then Hashem combines the thought with the deed. That is, through the good thought, Hashem combines and also purifies the deed. When a person turns from evil and does good, he can come to a revelation of Godliness. This is "And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre": when a person is in the bechinat (aspect of) "You have been rebellious (mamrim) against Hashem," that is, when the yetzer is overpowering him, he places Hashem in opposition to it. Then he can overpower it and serve Hashem. In truth it is better when a person refines the evil and takes from it the good for his avodah of Him, yitbarach. This is "And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre."

I say: When a person serves Hashem with fervor, he must take to heart, believe, and understand that the fervor came to him from Hashem, who gave it to him, and that he himself accomplished nothing. This is "as he sat at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." That is, with every fervor he must reflect in his heart and understand that he is still at the entrance, which is the gate to Hashem, and has not yet begun at all to serve Hashem with the traits of yirah (awe) and ahavah (love). He must know that "Yours, Hashem, are the greatness, the gevurah (strength, severity), and the tiferet (beauty, harmony)." For when a person thinks that his own strength and the work of his hand accomplished his avodah, he falls from his level. But when he understands that it is from Hashem, then Hashem, yitbarach, helps him so that he can serve Him with ahavah and yirah.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)

SHINOVA · MAREH YECHEZKEL ON TORAH, VAYERA

Why does Sarah's modesty matter for the news of a son?

Mareh Yechezkel

Drawing on the Talmud (Megillah 10b), the teaching holds that a modest bride gives rise to kings and prophets, and that the children of tzaddikim depend on the mother. That is why the angels' question about Sarah's modesty, "Where is Sarah your wife?", stands beside the tidings of a son, since a son born of a modest mother is a source of good offspring. AI SUMMARY

Aggadic novellae for a wedding. "Where is Sarah your wife?" etc. This is to explain its juxtaposition with "I will surely return to you" etc. Our Sages said (Megillah 10b): Every bride who is modest, kings and prophets come forth from her. The main thing is that good children and tzaddikim (righteous ones) depend on the mother, as stated regarding Kimchit, who was modest and therefore merited to raise high priests (Yoma 47a).

Now, the angels wished to give Avraham the good news that he would have a son from Sarah. The main offspring of tzaddikim are good deeds, that is, that their offspring too will have good deeds. If they are not tzaddikim, it would be better for him had they never been created.

So King Chizkiyahu of Judah said to Yeshayahu the prophet that he did not want to marry a wife, because he foresaw through ruach hakodesh (divine inspiration) that his sons would be wicked (Berachot 10a). Therefore the angels asked him about Sarah, and he answered them, "Behold, in the tent," meaning that she is modest, as Rashi explains.

On this basis there was a connection to the tidings of sons. This is the meaning of "I will surely return" etc., "and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son" etc.

SOCHATCHOV · SHEM MISHMUEL, VAYERA

Why did God make Avraham wait three days before the test?

Shem MiShmuel

The Shem MiShmuel reads the three-day delay before Avraham sees the Akedah site as a period of complete separation. Drawing on the Maharal's explanation of the three months before Matan Torah and the three months of the convert's examination, he argues that the first day belongs to the past, the third to the future, and the middle day divides them so that Avraham is wholly detached from his former nature. Since the test was to perform the opposite of his chesed, a man of lovingkindness, the interval lets him be fully transformed into one who is willing to act with cruelty at God's command. AI SUMMARY

"On the third day Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar." Rashi comments: Why did He delay showing it to him right away? So that they would not say that he was stunned and suddenly thrown into confusion, and that his mind was disturbed, etc.

But regarding the number of three days, one must consider why specifically three days, and not two or four. It appears that it is written, "In the third month after the children of Israel went out of the land of Egypt," the giving of the Torah took place. And in the midrash (rabbinic teaching) it says this is like the female convert, who must wait three months of examination.

And Maharal explains that the exodus from Egypt was a departure from the material. Until three months had passed, something of their former essence remained with them, but with the interval of three months they became completely distinct. For the first month is joined to the past, the third to the future, and the middle one is what divides and separates between them. This itself is the reason for the convert's three months of examination: so that she be completely separated from her former essence.

End of his words.

Now, regarding the test of the Akedah (the Binding of Yitzchak), it is stated in the books that the main test was that Avraham was a man of chesed (lovingkindness), to the point that he acted with kindness toward everyone who came into the world, even non-Jews.

And now he was commanded to perform a cruel act without equal: to slaughter with his own hands the son he loved more than his own life. This was the complete opposite of his attribute and his nature, from one extreme to the other. Through this his essence was tested, namely that he sets everything aside before the will of Hashem Yitbarach (God, may He be blessed), and is moved away from his attribute and nature to do the opposite, since such is the will of Hashem Yitbarach. To clothe himself in cruelty and to be cruel, he puts on cruelty.

Therefore one may say that this is the reason He delayed showing it to him for three days: so that he would be moved away entirely from his former nature and attribute, and there would be a complete separation between his former essence and his later essence. The first day is joined to the past, the third to the future, and the middle one entirely divides and separates, just like the three months there.

CHERNOBYL · ME'OR EINAYIM, VAYERA

Can even a wicked person draw close to God?

Me'or Einayim

Drawing on the Zohar, which identifies the three men as Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and on the Tikkunim's image of the rider and horse, the author reads Genesis 18 as describing how even a wicked person is visited by God through thoughts of teshuvah and can aspire to become a chariot for God's Name, so that he goes only where God wants and not where the yetzer hara leads. AI SUMMARY

"Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, as he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men," etc. "He saw, and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and bowed down to the ground."

The holy Zohar writes: Who are the three men? Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. It is known that the holy Torah must apply to every person and in every time, for it is eternal. But the truth is that the Creator, blessed be He, is found in every one of Israel, even in the greatest wicked person and the greatest transgressor, God forbid. The proof is that thoughts of teshuvah (return, repentance) come to every wicked person every day, and this is Hashem, blessed be He, appearing to him. As he goes on in this way, raising his intellect, he begins to say: "When will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers?"

For the forefathers are the chariot (merkavah). And what is a chariot? The Tikkunim writes: The horse is secondary to the rider, and the rider is not secondary to the horse, so that the horse would go where it wants and lead him to a river and to filthy places. Rather, it goes only to the place where the rider wants to go. So when a person is a chariot for God's great Name, he goes only where Hashem, blessed be He, wants him to go, for he does only the will of Hashem, blessed be He, and not the will of the yetzer hara (evil inclination).

This is why it says "Hashem appeared to him" without specifying, and does not write "to Avraham." It refers to every one of Israel, for Hashem, blessed be He, appears to each one. That is, even to a great wicked person, God forbid, Hashem, blessed be He, appears, namely through the thoughts of teshuvah that come to him, as explained above.

"And he was sitting at the entrance of the tent" means that an opening is opened for him, "in the heat of the day," when the fervor of thoughts of teshuvah comes to him. "He lifted his eyes" means that he raises his intellect. "And he saw, and behold, three men": Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. That is to say, he sees the level of the forefathers, who were a chariot for His great Name. "He saw, and he ran toward them" means that he says, "When will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers?" He too wants to reach this level, to be a chariot for Him, blessed be He, so that he goes only where He, blessed be He, wants.

"From the entrance of the tent" means from that same opening that was opened for him, as above. And then "he bowed down to his face." Bowing is a drawing down: he draws down [influence] to the aspect of earthliness. And understand this.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)

KOZHNITZ · VAYERA, AVODAT YISRAEL

Why did Avraham have guests washed through a messenger?

Avodat Yisrael

Drawing on Rashi's reading that Avraham had the water brought through a messenger, and on the Midrash's link between that detail and Moshe's striking of the rock, the author asks why the lovingkindness of Avraham fell short in personal service to guests. His answer is that a tzaddik must draw all people near to divine service, but must first purify them and not soil himself by mingling with them before they are cleansed of their idolatry. Because divine compassion calls for the tzaddik to serve the seekers personally, Avraham's use of an agent in washing their feet was a flaw for which he was punished. AI SUMMARY

"Let a little water be brought" (Bereshit 18:4). Rashi explains: through a messenger. And the Holy One, blessed be He, repaid his children through a messenger, as it says, "And Moshe raised the staff and struck the rock" (see there). This requires understanding. Why did Avraham Avinu, the man of lovingkindness, stumble by giving water through a messenger and not honor the guests himself? The mitzvah (commandment) is greater when done personally than through an agent. Afterward, too, he said, "And I will fetch a morsel of bread," meaning that he would trouble himself personally for them, though not at first.

One may say as follows. It is the way of the tzaddik (righteous one) to bring all the people of the world close to the avodah (divine service) of Hashem. This is all the more true of Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, who caused God's name, may He be blessed, to be proclaimed by the mouth of all creatures.

But at first it seemed to him that they were Arabs, and he did not want to descend from his holiness and mingle with them, lest he be soiled by them and by their thoughts. Therefore, regarding the washing, since they needed to be washed clean of their idols, he said, "Let a little water be brought" through a messenger, "and wash your feet," from your habitual ways. For it is a established principle that before a person enters into holiness, he must wash himself, purify himself, and cleanse himself of his filth and of the impurity of his deeds. Afterward comes "and rest yourselves under the tree," which is the Tree of Life, to bring them into holiness.

Therefore he afterward said, "And I will fetch a morsel (pat) of bread," for the word pat has the same gematria (numerical value) as talmud (480). That is, after they were purified and had entered into the secret of holiness, he troubled himself personally to bestow holiness upon them.

He then gave them the reason: "For that is why you have passed by your servant." He called himself by the term "servant," because the tzaddik is called, in the aspect of a servant, to all who come into the world. He must perform every kind of service for them, bestowing on them purity, holiness, wisdom, and understanding, and also all physical blessings, as far as is possible.

Nevertheless, he was punished in that the Holy One, blessed be He, repaid his children with the water only through a messenger. For given the greatness of the compassion of the Holy One, blessed be He, for His creatures, it was fitting that Avraham extend himself to them even in the matter of the washing, and wash them himself, trusting in his Creator to guard him from all evil.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)

AVRITCH · BAT AYIN, VAYERA

Why does God personally go down to see the sinners of Sodom?

Bat Ayin

Drawing on the Zohar's reading of "I will go down and see," the Bat Ayin presents God's concern in Sodom as mercy: God wanted Avraham to know that He personally descends from level to level to stir sinners to teshuvah, and that Avraham's plea for justice is really a plea for even greater mercy, so that even a small number of penitent individuals would be accepted and the city spared. AI SUMMARY

"Shall I conceal from Avraham that which I am doing, etc." "Far be it from You to judge all the earth, etc." (Bereshit 18:25). One may say as follows. Why did God say "Shall I conceal"? Surely it is a matter that is bound to be revealed. There is a further difficulty: at the very beginning of Avraham's conversation with God, he began with harsh words, saying "Far be it from You, etc." And there is yet another difficulty: how could Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, judge the Creator, blessed be He, for doing such a thing, putting a tzaddik (righteous one) to death along with the wicked?

To understand this: what the Creator, blessed be He, mainly wanted to make known to Avraham, His beloved, was not the destruction and overturning of Sodom. Rather, He wanted to make known to him the greatness of His kindness, may He be blessed, in the matter of teshuvah (return, repentance).

This is what the Creator, blessed be He, said to him: "The outcry of Sodom and Amorah, etc." That is to say: you know that the people of Sodom are very wicked and sinful, and nevertheless I do not desire their death but rather that they return from their ways, etc. Moreover, I Myself will arouse their hearts to teshuvah.

This is what Scripture means by "I will go down and see." That is to say, I will descend from level to level (as it is stated in the Zohar, Part I, p. 105b), and I will arouse their hearts to teshuvah. "And afterward I will see whether, according to the outcry that has come to Me, they have done": that is to say, if they have done teshuvah in proportion to the outcry of sin that has come to Me, meaning that they have done great and excellent teshuvah in proportion to the damage of the sin, then "kalah": that is to say, I will wipe away and finish off their iniquity.

And if they do not do teshuvah to that degree, "eda'ah": that is to say, to forgive in proportion to the teshuvah, with a little suffering. Avraham did not know of this kindness, that God Himself arouses the hearts of sinners to teshuvah.

When Avraham heard the greatness of His kindness, may He be blessed, Avraham said: if the attribute of chesed (lovingkindness) is so great, then even if not all of them do teshuvah, but only ten per city, that is, individuals, the teshuvah of an individual will also be accepted teshuvah. And so he said, "Far be it from You; shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" That is to say, "justice, it is mercy" (Zohar, Part III, p. 91a). The explanation is: since You are merciful to the earth, descending from level to level to arouse their hearts to teshuvah, it is fitting for You to be even more merciful, so that even if only ten per city do teshuvah it will be accepted, and likewise when a number of individuals do teshuvah, the teshuvah of an individual will also be accepted.

This is what he meant by "chalilah": he thought that because the essence of teshuvah lies in arousal from Above, He would therefore not accept the teshuvah of an individual. About this he prayed, "Shall the Judge of all the earth..." That is to say, in accordance with the greatness of Your kindness and mercy, may Your kindness be increased to this as well. And the Creator, blessed be He, answered him

that so it is: even if a number of individuals do teshuvah, it will be accepted before Me, and I will not destroy.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)



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COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Why a rare note in Genesis signals inner ambivalence

Rabbi Sacks: The Ambivalent Jew

The rare shalshelet trope, appearing three times in Genesis, musically conveys psychological ambivalence—the frozen, wavering state of a person caught between two identities or paths, as seen in Eliezer's mixed feelings, Yosef's inner struggle, and especially Lot's hesitation to leave Sodom after investing his identity in assimilation there. Lot's tragic indecision, rooted in his failed attempt to belong among people who ultimately still saw him as an alien, mirrors the experience of modern Jews who sought acceptance through assimilation only to find it did not protect them and cost them their authentic identity. The contrast with Avraham—who lived apart as a "stranger and sojourner" yet was honored as "a prince of God"—teaches that security and respect come from embracing one's identity fully, never from ambivalence about who and what one is. AI SUMMARY

The Ambivalent Jew

The Torah does not have a word for ambivalence – the nearest is Elijah's question to the Baal-worshipping Israelites: "How long will you waver between two opinions?" (I Kings 18:21). It does, however, have a tune for it. This is the rare note known as the shalshelet.

The shalshelet is an unusual note, going up and down, up and down, as if unable to move forward to the next note. The sixteenth-century commentator Rabbi Joseph ibn Caspi best defined what it was meant to convey: namely, a psychological state of uncertainty and indecision. The graphic notation of the shalshelet itself looks like a streak of lightning, a "zigzag movement" (tenua me'uvetet), a mark that goes repeatedly backwards and forwards. It conveys frozen motion – what Hamlet called "the native hue of resolution sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought" – in which the agent is torn by inner conflict. The shalshelet is the music of ambivalence.

The rare notation appears three times in Genesis, in each case signifying an existential crisis.

The individual concerned is called upon to make a choice, one on which his whole future will depend – but finds that he cannot. He is torn between two alternatives, both of which exercise a powerful sway. He must resolve the dilemma one way or another, but either choice will involve letting go of intensely felt temptations or deeply held aspirations. These are moments of high psychological drama.

One instance occurs in Genesis 24:12. Abraham has sent his servant (not identified in the text, but taken by the commentators to be Eliezer) to find a wife for his son Isaac in the city of Haran. Arriving at the town's well, Eliezer proposes a test: the woman who comes to draw water, offers some to the traveller, and in addition gives water to his camels, will be the one chosen by God for his master's son. Over the "and he said" introducing his request of God that this test should succeed, the masoretic tradition has placed a shalshelet.

The commentators identify multiple sources of ambivalence at this point. First are doubts about the permissibility of the test – Jewish law forbids relying on "omens," and Eliezer may have felt that his test was dangerously close to pagan practice (the Ran to Hullin 95b, however, states that Eliezer's conduct was legitimate; he sought not an omen but a sign of the woman's character). Ibn Caspi suggests that Eliezer was unsure as to whether a single test like this was sufficient grounds on which to base so fateful a decision as the choice of a marriage partner for Isaac. The Midrash, however, offers the most insightful explanation: Eliezer had mixed feelings

not about the test, but about the mission itself. Until that point, says the Midrash, he had been "sitting and weighing whether his own daughter was suitable for Isaac."

He had hoped, in other words, that one way or another, Abraham's estate would pass to him.

There are two cues that led the Midrash to this hypothesis. The first is that when Abraham first spoke to God about his childlessness, he said: "O Sovereign Lord, what can You give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus" (15:2). Eliezer, at that time, was Abraham's putative heir.

The second is that when Abraham charges his servant with the mission to find a wife for his son, Eliezer replies, "Perhaps [ulai] the woman will not be willing to come back with me to this land" (24:5). As Ibn Ezra notes, the word ulai is not neutral.

It signifies an emotional involvement in the outcome: one wishes for the eventuality to either come to pass or not come to pass. Eliezer's "perhaps" may have been an unconscious expression of the fact that, with half his mind, he wanted the mission to fail. This would have once again placed him or his daughter in a position to be Abraham's heir. It was therefore with profoundly mixed feelings that he prayed for the woman who would be God's choice of Isaac's wife to appear.

More dramatic still is the case of Joseph. Child of a shepherd, Jacob, an almost youngest son, hated by his brothers and sold by them into slavery, he finds himself in Egypt as head of household to one of its prominent citizens, Potiphar. Left alone with his master's wife, he finds himself propositioned by her: "Now Joseph was beautiful of form and fair to look upon. And it came to pass that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and she said: 'Lie with me'" (39:6–7). The text continues: "But he refused..." (39:8). Over this verb, tradition has placed a shalshelet.

We can imagine the conflict in Joseph's mind at that moment. On the one hand, his entire moral sense said No. It would be a betrayal of everything his family stood for: their ethic of sexual propriety and their strong sense of identity as children of the covenant. It would also be, as Joseph himself says, a betrayal of Potiphar himself:

With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; he has entrusted everything he has to my care. No one is greater in this house than I. My master has withheld nothing from me but you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? (39:8–9)

And yet, the temptation must have been intense. He was in an urban civilisation of a kind he had not seen before. It was his first experience of "bright lights, big city." He was far from home. No one could see him. After all the hostility he had suffered in his childhood, being propositioned by Potiphar's wife must have been flattering as well as seductive. It was a decisive moment. A slave, with no realistic hope of rescue – was he to become an Egyptian, with all the sexual laissez faire that implied? Or would he remain faithful to his past, his conscience, his identity?

The Talmud gives a graphic description of his inner torment:

The image of his father appeared to him in the window and said, "Joseph, your brothers' names are destined to be inscribed on the stones of the [high priest's] breastplate, and you will be among them. Do you want your name to be erased? Do you want to be called an adulterer?"

The shalshelet is an elegant commentary to Joseph's crise de conscience. In the end, Joseph refuses, but not without deep inner struggle.

Which brings us to Parashat Vayera, the first appearance of the shalshelet in the Torah. Here the conflict is explicit. Two of the angels who had visited Abraham now come to Lot in Sodom. They warn him that the city and its inhabitants are about to be destroyed. He and his family must leave immediately. But Lot delays:

The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here – sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, for we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that God has

sent us to destroy it." So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who married his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them. (19:12–16)

Over "he hesitated" is a shalshelet.

Lot's hesitation goes to the core of his identity. Earlier, when he and Abraham had agreed to separate to end the quarrel between their herdsmen, "Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar...So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east" (13:10–11). He chose to make his home in Sodom, despite the fact that, as the Torah notes at that point, its inhabitants "were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord" (13:13).

Having chosen to put down roots in the Jordan valley and the cities of the plain, Lot no longer sees himself, as did Abraham, as "a stranger and temporary resident" (23:4). On the contrary, Lot and his family become profoundly assimilated. His daughters marry local men; Lot rises to public position. The sages interpret the phrase at the beginning of the chapter, "Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city" (19:1), as meaning "he had just been appointed as a judge" – the gate of the city being the place where, in Abrahamic times, the judges and elders sat to resolve disputes.

Sodom is where Lot sees himself as belonging – so much so that the visitors have to drag him away physically.

Lot's sense of belonging, however, is either naiveté or self-deception. The text makes this clear at three points. The first is the attempted sexual assault on Lot's visitors (19:4–5). Evidently the people of Sodom do not take kindly to strangers. This is the first hint that perhaps Lot is also, in their eyes, a stranger. In fact, he is. The Torah, in its second indication, is brutally explicit:

"Get out of our way," they replied [to Lot, when he begged them to respect his visitors]. Then they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." (19:7–9)

The third comes when he tells his daughters' husbands that they must escape because the city is about to be destroyed, and "his sons-in-law thought he was joking." Lot's elaborate new identity is about to come crashing down about him – not only because of the impending destruction but because he has discovered in successive blows that he has not been accepted in this place. Sodom hates strangers, they still consider Lot "an alien" and his sons-in-law regard him as a fool.

Yet despite this, he hesitates. He has invested too much of himself into the project of making his home among the people of the plain. He is a prime example of what Leon Festinger called cognitive dissonance.

According to Festinger, the need to avoid dissonance and the unbearable tension it creates, is fundamental to human beings. It is this tension that Lot cannot resolve – and which is signalled by the shalshelet over "he hesitated." This was a moment when he faced the ultimate existential question: "Who am I?" Having tried so hard to become one of them, he finds it almost impossible to tear himself away.

Festinger's theory also explains the behaviour of Lot's wife who "looked back [against the explicit instruction of the angels] and was turned into a pillar of salt" (19:36). Festinger called this syndrome "post-decision dissonance." He predicted that the more important the issue, the longer the person delays a decision and the harder it is to reverse, the more he or she will agonize over whether they have made the right choice. They have second thoughts; they need reassurance; they "look back."

The shalshelet over Lot's hesitation is no mere detail of the biblical text. It is, in a real sense, the story of the modern Jew. Entering mainstream

society for the first time, and yet still encountering overt or covert anti-Semitism, many nineteenth-century European Jews became ambivalent about their identity. They tried to hide it and to assimilate. They became secular Marranos. It did not work. The more they strove to be like everyone else, the more conspicuous they were, and the stronger anti-Semitism grew. They themselves lost much in the process – not only their Jewish heritage itself, but also the simple capacity to know and take pride in who they were. Tragically, the confusion and emotional investment was so deep that many repeated the hesitancy of Lot: many Jews in Germany and Austria in the 1930s refused to leave because they would not or could not believe the evidence around them that Hitler was serious in his threats to destroy the Jews.

The lives of Lot and Abraham exemplify for all time the contrast between ambivalence and the security that comes from knowing who one is and why. Lot, who tried to become someone else, found himself regarded by his neighbours as an alien, an arriviste, an interloper, a parvenu. To his own sons-in-law he was a "joker." Abraham lived a different kind of life. He fought a war on behalf of his neighbours. He prayed for them. But he lived apart, true to his faith, his mission and his covenant with God. Yet even as he called himself a "stranger and sojourner" (23:4), the Hittites saw him as "a prince of God in our midst" (23:6). That equation has not changed. Non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. They are embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed by Judaism. Never be ambivalent about who and what you are.

THE NETZIV

Why did God test Avraham after all his earlier blessings?

Ha'amek Davar on Genesis 22:1

The binding of Yitzchak (Akeidah) comes as the culmination of a long progression in which God gradually elevated Avraham through successive blessings—land, seed, circumcision—until this final test, after which no further communication or growth was needed. The term "nissa" (tested) does not merely mean an examination of Avraham's existing righteousness, like testing a jug's strength, but, as the midrash of the banner (nes) teaches, actively raised and rooted a new level of potential within him, a quality that became permanently embedded in the character of the Jewish people for all generations. God called to Avraham and waited for his calm reply, "Hineni" (Here I am), so that he would receive the momentous request with a settled mind rather than respond improperly out of confusion. AI SUMMARY

"Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am.""

And after these events: — It is clear that this section has a relationship to the section before it. As otherwise, the expression, "after these events," is not fitting. Though the manner of the relationship is explained in Rashi's commentary according to the aggadah in Sanhedrin (89) - if it is so, they are distant in time from one another, according to the tradition that Yitzchak was thirty-seven at the time of the binding. And there are some that explain that it is a punishment for the covenant he made with Avimelekh. But this is also not proximate in time - for behold that the matter of the covenant was at that [same] time, of Yitzchak and the expulsion of Yishmael. In truth, there is an argument in the Midrash if, "after (achar)" is proximate, and "following (achrei)" is remote, or the opposite.

However it appears that the explanation of, "after these events" [here], is after all the utterances and statements that there were between the Holy One,

blessed be He, and Avraham. And He had raised him - little by little - higher and higher: From the beginning of His blessing him with the Land of Israel and with seed like the dust of the earth; and afterwards with the increase of children like the stars of the sky - meaning people of great worth - and afterwards, He blessed him at the time of the circumcision that the would be a father to many nations. That is that he would have the ability to have even the nations of the world - who would be called by the name, nations, and would not completely convert - recognize the God of the world. However there was still a particular that was missing, as will be explained. And the matter of the binding was after all of these things. For with this, the greatness of Avraham, our father, and his seed was completed, such that nothing more was needed. So from then on, the Holy One, blessed be He, did not speak with him; and there was no more content and addition to the goal that had been desired.

And because of that. it is written, "and God tested (nissa) Avraham." As even though the text does not depart from its straightforward understanding, which is the matter of a test - according to its straightforward understanding alone, it is superfluous. As we surely see that it is a test. And this is even though we should not ask why God, who knows everything from the beginning, needs a test - as it is a question of [divine] knowledge and [human] choice, which is loftier than human knowledge. So we should [just] know that the ways of God are above our ways, as are His thoughts [above] our thoughts.

However there is another meaning to this, as it is found in Rabbah (Bereishit Rabbah 55:1) on this: Nissa is from the usage, "You have given a banner (nes) to those who fear You, that it may be displayed (lehitnosess)" (Psalms 60:6) - meaning He raised him upon a banner. The Sages, may their memory be blessed, explained that with this test, He extended the power of Avraham, our father, and raised him to the purpose of the Israelite nation, as will be explained.

And the Sages, may their memory be blessed, in Rabbah there, have already drawn a metaphor about the content of the test with three analogies: 1) To a good jug that a buyer knocks, as opposed to a bad one. 2) To good flax that he hits much; so that the more he hits it, the more it improves, as opposed to bad flax. 3) He adds much to the load of a good donkey, and examines it [to determine whether] it can carry more. And the matter of the three analogies is to teach us that a test comes for three aspects. On one occasion, it comes like the analogy of the good jug, about which the knocking is not in order to improve it, but rather to know how strong the jug is. And on [another] occasion, it comes like the analogy of the flax, about which the knocking does not come in order to know [its] strength, but rather to improve [it]. And on [a third] occasion, it comes like the analogy of a donkey, about which it does not come in order to know [it] or in order to improve [it]; rather when its owner has a large load, he is testing his donkey [whether] it can carry more, which will be good for him. And the owner will add to its nourishment afterwards according to the additional load that his donkey carries.

Likewise on one occasion, a test comes to know the power of a person's righteousness, and that is considered an examination. On [another] occasion, a test comes in order to add to his righteousness. As even though this action rests in a person's potential, so long as the action has not come to him and he has not actualized the potential, this potential has nevertheless not become rooted within him. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, brings him to this test; and he [then] strengthens himself to actualize his potential and roots this potential inside himself. And on [a third] occasion, a test will come for the iniquity of the generation. So He will place them - a load of afflictions - upon the righteous one, and he will receive his full reward afterwards.

From here, the midrash on this section teaches us that we should not think that this test came about only like the first analogy of the jug, as an examination. For if so, Avraham, our father, did not become elevated with this. It is not so. Rather the Holy One, blessed be He, raised the power of our father Avraham's holy being with this action. And that is the meaning of, "[God] nisa Avraham, from the usage, "You have given a banner (nes) to those who fear You, that it may be displayed (lehitnosess)." And with that which this potential was rooted into Avraham's being, this action remained rooted in the

Israelite nation for [all] generations - as will be further explained on verse 17 (Haamek Davar on Genesis 22:17). And see Exodus 16:4 and Deuteronomy 8:2 and 9:7.

Furthermore, it should be explained that which, "test," is not also written about Yitzchak - as behold, he was already thirty-seven years old! However it shall be explained below that the purpose of this act upon Yitzchak was on account of the settlement of Israel upon their land, [such that] their bread was fixed by way of the daily sacrifices. So it was particularly fit that it would be so through Yitzchak, since this principle came out to the world with his birth, as I wrote earlier [on] 21:3 (Haamek Davar on Genesis 21:3). So it was not for the purpose of a test; and it was then like the other tests through which Avraham was tested, and about which it was [also] not written that it was a test. However, that which the Holy One, blessed be He, hid the intent from Avraham, our father - that was only in order to be a test.

Avraham; and he said, "Here I am": — The Holy One, blessed be He, did not say at once, "Avraham, please take [etc.]." Rather He waited for him, until Avraham's mind became settled and he understood that the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to speak to him [about] a great thing; and he answered, "Here I am." And this was so that he would not be [too] confused to hear, and [then] answer something improper, God forbid. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, waited until his mind became settled.

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מקורות

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