רמב"ן · אור החיים

Ramban & Or HaChayim

ראשון FIRST ALIYAH

18:1 *The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.*

RAMBAN

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.

OR HACHAIM

G'd appeared to him. Why is Abraham, the subject of the vision, mentioned before G'd? The normal construction would have been וירא השם אליו. In the previous visions Abraham received, G'd is always referred to first (compare 12,7 and 17,1).

Why does the Torah not mention the nature of this vision, the subject matter discussed, etc.? Our sages in Baba Metzia 86 say that G'd simply paid Abraham a visit, seeing the latter was still recovering from the effects of the circumcision. While this is a nice explanation, there is not a hint of this in the text.

I believe that the message to Abraham was that henceforth G'd's presence would rest on him on a permanent basis [that he enjoyed a measure of the Holy Spirit. Ed.] In kabbalistic terms, Abraham had now become a "carrier of the שכינה." Bereshit

Rabbah 47,6 describes all the patriarchs in those terms. The present form of address indicates that G'd's presence became felt by Abraham. Had the Torah used the usual wording we could not have become aware that G'd distinguishes between revelation itself, and the One who reveals Himself. It is because of this that Abraham's future visions are never again introduced by the word וירא. We find only: "G'd spoke to Abraham." This is a reminder he already wore the "crown" indicating that G'd's presence was upon him.

The term "He appeared to him" also alludes to the letter י of G'd's name becoming visible on Abraham's flesh as mentioned in Tanchuma 96 and Zohar 1,95: "when the holy רשימא rests on someone this means that G'd's presence rests on someone."

The message is also that now that Abraham was circumcised he was able to absorb a vision of G'd in His superior light. Not all visions are of the same calibre. Once Abraham was circumcised he became privy to a prophetic vision in the full sense of that word. He was able to absorb the full name of G'd, i.e. the tetragram. We would not have understood this if the Torah had written: וירא ה' אל אברהם.

An additional meaning of the verse and the way it is phrased is that G'd appeared to Abraham for Abraham's sake. The Torah here alludes to something discussed in Baba Metzia 86. Rabbi Chama son of Chanina stated that this vision occurred on the third day after the circumcision. G'd came and enquired after Abraham's wellbeing. How did Rabbi Chama know that it was the third day? If we were to deduce this from Genesis 34,25, where we are told that the third day after the people of Shechem had circumsised themselves was a day they experienced additional pains, this cannot be, because we have a definitive statement in Shabbat 134 that the first and second day after the circumcision are more dangerous to the patient! True, the Talmud there distinguishes between the pain and the relative healing process experienced by adults (pain lasts longer, healing occurs more slowly), compared to that experienced by minors. However, such a distinction applies only to the third day, not to the first two days. On the first two days everyone experiences the most pain.

Besides, do not use the fact that Shimon and Levi did not attack the people of Shechem until the third day after their circumcision as an argument. These sons of Jacob were not concerned with the pain of the people of Shechem but with their physical weakness, their relative inability to offer resistance. The third day is definitely the day such patients feel weakest. Regarding the danger of infection from the wound and danger to life, etc., the first two days are far more dangerous than the third day. Why should we assume then that G'd did not come and visit Abraham on the first or second day after the circumcision? I have found an interesting comment in the Tur Yore Deah item 335 in which he quotes this folio in the Talmud without mentioning that it was on the third day. According to that version the simple message of Rabbi Chama is that G'd came to pay a visit to the sick. [The discussion in Shabbat 134 concerns washing a baby with hot water on the third day after the circumcision if the third day is on the Sabbath; permission to do this indicates that on that day the baby's life is in danger. Ed.]

According to the opinion of Ran that the first and the third days are the most dangerous to the patient, whereas the second day is not sufficiently dangerous to desecrate the Sabbath, we can understand the matter better. When you do not feel in danger, G'd applies the general rule of not visiting the sick during the first three hours of the morning. On the first day one also does not visit the sick as we know from Nedarim 40. When Rava was sick, he told his household not to tell anyone on the first day about his being sick in order not to influence his horoscope negatively. Rashi explains this to mean "that one should not talk about the sick person." [As long as the matter is not public knowledge an immediate cure may result without the debits and merits of the sick person being reviewed in heaven because of people talking about him. Ed.] However Rava did want the fact that he was sick publicised from the second day on, so that all those who hated him should rejoice over his being sick. This would help diminish his debits [in the accounts kept in the celestial ledger. Ed.]. Rabbi Chama did not think G'd visited on the first day, as such a visit would certainly not have gone unnoticed, and as a result tongues would have been set wagging. Yerushalmi Peah third chapter states that the relatives of a sick person may visit him immediately; this is because such visits do not contribute to the sickness of the patient becoming public knowledge. There is certainly no doubt that G'd Himself must be viewed as a very close relative of the sick person. However, a visit by G'd would most certainly attract attention. According to the opinion that there is no difference in the degree of danger on either of the respective three days, this would leave the question of why Rabbi Chama had to mention the third day as the day G'd visited Abraham. We may have to assume that these people had the version of the Tur which did not mention the third day at all.

18:2 *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,*

RAMBAN

STOOD OVER HIM. The purport thereof is that they were standing opposite Abraham and looking at him, the expression being similar to: that stood over the reapers; the chief officers that stood over the work. And due to the fact that he [Abraham] was sitting and they were standing and looking at him, the verse says, "over him." This is also the meaning of the expression, And he saw, and ran to meet them, for as he saw them standing opposite him and not continuing their journey, he ran to meet them in order to bring them to his house. The sense of the expression, From the tent door, is that Abraham was still sitting there after the vision of the Shechinah had departed from him. It is possible that the expression "over him" refers to the tent, i.e., that they were near it on the side which was not opposite the door, and there they stood and did not approach Abraham, just as in the verse, encamping 'al' (on) the sea.

OR HACHAIM

When he raised his eyes he saw, etc. Why did the Torah add the word והנה?" Besides, why did the Torah add that the three men נצבים, "were standing?" This is no more than normal! What does the addition of that word add to our understanding? Furthermore, what is the meaning of the word עליו, "upon him?" The meaning of that word cannot be that they were merely close to Abraham! If that were the case, why did Abraham have to run towards them? Another difficulty in the paragraph is the repetition of the word וירא! Why does the Torah portray Abraham as bowing down to these men before he knew who they were, i.e. angels and not Arabs?

We must understand the report of the Torah in terms of what transpired later, i.e. that the men were indeed angels who appeared in human garb in order to partake of Abraham's hospitality for reasons known to us. The words וירא והנה simply mean that Abraham saw that they were apparently men, something which later on proved to have been an error on his part. He had judged the outward appearance. Had the Torah not added the word והנה, the report would have been a lie.

The word נצבים means that Abraham, who was by now familiar with celestial messengers, realised that these "men" had been sent to him for a specific purpose, for his sake. One of them, for instance, had been charged with the task of healing him. A second one had been sent to inform him that by that time in the following year Sarah would have a son. The third one, whose task appeared to be the destruction of Sodom, nevertheless had detoured in order to afford Abraham an oppportunity to intercede on behalf of the people of Sodom before G'd would carry out His judgment on that city. In other words, his whole presence there was "עליו, on account of him (Abraham)."

The expression אנשים נצבים may allude to the human posture these angels assumed. The word עליו means "on his account," i.e. for his sake, so that he could perform the מצוה of hospitality. Abraham realised that they were angels because the bearing of an angel cannot be disguised. We know this already from the wife of Manoach (Judges 13,2). If that lady realised that she faced an angel, someone of Abraham's stature would certainly be aware of the presence of an angel. After all, Abraham had already encountered angels previously. The word וירא a second time merely confirmed Abraham's original impression seeing that he had been healed and was able to run towards them. An angel has long-distance vision and inasmuch as the cure he performs is of a spiritual nature, he does not need to be physically close to the patient. As soon as Abraham felt cured, he bowed down to the angel in gratitude to G'd.

18:3 *he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant.*

RAMBAN

'ADONAY,' IF NOW I HAVE FOUND FAVOR IN THY EYES. We find the word Adonay here in the books marked with a kamatz. Thus it must be that he called them by the name of their Master, i.e., with the Aleph Dalet, as he recognized them to be angels of the Supreme One, even as they are called elohim and eilim. For this reason he bowed down to the earth to them.

PASS NOT AWAY, I PRAY THEE, FROM THY SERVANT. Abraham spoke to each one of the angels, as is the way of the whole Torah: Ye shall keep all My statutes... and do them; The nakedness of thy father, and the nakedness of thy mother, shalt thou not uncover; And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corner of thy field; And from thence ye will seek the Eternal thy G-d, and thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. The greater part of the Mishneh Torah is written in this manner. A counter-example to the above is the verse: Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. Now our Rabbis have said, "Abraham spoke to the chief of the angels." It is also possible that he said to the chief, "Pass not away, I pray thee, [in the singular sense], and thou and thy companions who will remain with thee wash your feet," [the verb "wash" being in the plural form]. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that he called them all "lords," and he turned to each individual, saying to the first one: If now I have found favor in thy eyes, pass not away, and to the second one he said the same, and the same to the third one. He begged each one individually: If now I have found favor in thy eyes, pass not away, and, let now a little water be fetched, and all of ye wash your feet. This was by way of ethical conduct and respect out of his great desire to show kindness towards them. Now he recognized them as transients who did not have the desire to lodge there. This is why he asked of them only that a little water be fetched to wash their feet a little from the heat, to give cold waters to a faint soul, and that they recline under the tree in the cool of the day without coming into the tent and the tabernacle.

OR HACHAIM

He said: "my lords, if I have found favour, etc. We need to know why Abraham did not speak to all three of them at the same time. Bereshit Rabbah 48,10 mentions that Abraham said to the leader, Michael, that "a little water should be taken, etc." This is merely a homiletical explanation. How would Michael know that Abraham's invitation was addressed to all three of them when Abraham spoke to Michael in the singular?

The reason Abraham addressed only Michael was that he felt that the other two were going to come to him even without a specific invitation, seeing that G'd had despatched them with messages for him. One was meant to cure him, the other to inform him of the impending birth of Isaac. The same did not apply to the third angel Gabriel, whose function it was to destroy Sodom. He had no task to perform in Abraham's home. This is why Abraham appealed to him not to depart until he had partaken of his hospitality. Gabriel consented.

18:4 *Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree.*

OR HACHAIM

Let a little water be brought. Perhaps the reason Abraham spoke about a "little" water was to indicate that it was not much of an effort to procure it. He certainly was not miserly. Apparently, he did not want to depart from his custom to ask guests to wash their feet to remove the dust that most of them worshipped (Baba Metzia 86). [The author felt the need to justify the custom seeing Abraham was already aware that his guests were angels and not given to worship the dust. Abraham may not have wanted his servants to realise that his guests were angels. Ed.]

Abraham may have hinted to the angels that the water he spoke about was a reference to the Torah. Torah is multi-faceted; it speaks to us as פשט, plain meaning of the words, and it also contains messages on a far deeper level. Abraham faced heavenly beings in human guise, i.e. G'd had made a body for them through solidifying something normally ethereal. When an angel assumes human form his "body" is compared to the "foot". This is a concept familiar to students of the Kabbalah (Zohar 1,58). Abraham hinted to the angels that they should take a little of the plain meaning of the Torah i.e. "water," seeing that they were presently in human form. They could then rest under the "the Tree," i.e. hyperbole for Torah which is known as עץ החיים. He referred to it as העץ, though it had not previously featured in our story. He also told them to take פת לחם, a reference to the inner meanings of Torah, something he alluded to when speaking about their לבבכם, inner organs. He invited the angels to enjoy the inner aspects of Torah. [This is not so strange-sounding, seeing angels had never been given the Torah. Ed.] The reason

he did not merely say פת but פת לחם, was a hint that this bread had inner properties, i.e. its numerical value being 78, or three times the numerical value (26) of the four-lettered Holy Name. This was an allusion to eternal life, i.e. past, present and future.

18:5 *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."*

RAMBAN

FORASMUCH AS YE PASSED BY. Since your path crossed near me, it is not proper that you should not rest a little with me. So do, as thou hast said. This is an ethical expression indicating that a morsel of bread will be sufficient. Thus the language of Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra. It may be that the verse is stating, "So shalt thou do to us, that we recline under the tree and pass immediately as we are messengers, and therefore do not detain us by making us come into the tent or lodge with you."

OR HACHAIM

for this is why you have come by your servant. These words were intended to silence the argument that once Abraham had recognised that his visitors were angels he should not have offered to give them human food. Although we explained that Abraham alluded to the spiritual nourishment the angels were to enjoy, this did not mean that we are to ignore the plain meaning of the verse. Terrestrial food also contains spiritually valuable ingredients as we know from Proverbs 13,25: "the righteous man eats to satisfy his soul." Abraham said to the angels that the reason they appeared in the guise of human beings was in order for them to partake of his food seeing that the spiritual content of that food also assumed the forms of the terrestrial world. The angels responded saying כן, yes, that Abraham was quite correct. They added that he should proceed as he had intended, i.e. to let them enjoy the spiritual content of the food.

18:6 *Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three seahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!"*

RAMBAN

MEAL, FINE FLOUR. The fine flour for the cakes; the meal for the dough used by cooks to place over the pot to absorb the scum. Thus the words of Rashi. And so it is found in Bereshith Rabbah. Now there the Sages explained that there were three measures of meal and three measures of fine flour for each one of the guests. But we do not know why he served so much bread for three men. Perhaps he was aware of how the food disappeared successively, and it was as if he was offering more Burnt-offerings upon the altar, or perhaps because in their honor chiefs of his house dined with them. By way of the simple meaning [of Scripture, the verse is to be interpreted as follows: Make ready quickly three measures of meal to make of them fine flour. Thus from the entire three measures of meal, they extracted a bit of fine flour.

18:7 *Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it.*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAHAM RAN UNTO THE HERD. The purport thereof is to tell us of his great desire to bestow kindness. This great man had three hundred and eighteen men in his house, each one a swordsman, and he was very old and weakened by his circumcision, yet he went personally to Sarah's tent to urge her in the making of the bread, and afterwards he ran to the place of the herd to chose a calf, tender and good, to prepare for his guests, and he did not have all these done by means of one of his servants who stood ready to serve him.

18:9 *They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he replied, "There, in the tent."*

OR HACHAIM

They said: "Where is your wife Sarah? The angels wanted that Abraham should realise that the message they had to deliver was primarily for Sarah; this is why they enquired about her whereabouts. Abraham indicated that she was within the tent ready to listen to what they had to say to her.

18:10 *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.*

RAMBAN

I WILL CERTAINLY RETURN UNTO THEE WHEN THE SEASON COMETH AROUND. Rashi comments, "The angel was not announcing that he would return to him, but he was speaking to him as G-d's agent, [meaning that G-d would return]. This is similar to the verse: And the angel of the Eternal said to her [Hagar], I will multiply thy seed exceedingly. But he [the angel] has no power to multiply, and he was therefore speaking as G-d's agent. So also here, he spoke as G-d's agent." Now the Rabbi found it necessary to say so because the Holy One, blessed be He, told Abraham here, At the set time I will return unto thee. However, whether it be a reference to the angel or to the Holy One, blessed be He, we do not find it recorded that at the set time He returned. Perhaps a reference to this return is included in the expression, And the Eternal remember-ed Sarah, as He had said, and the Eternal did unto Sarah as He had spoken. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that the verse beginning, And the Eternal said to Abraham, means that the angel said it in the name of Him Who sent him, and he did return at the set time which he had told him, even though it is not written in Scripture. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that [the expression, shov ashuv (I will certainly return)], is akin to the phrase, liteshuvath hashanah (at the return of the year). The verse is thus stating: "I will surely bring back to thee a time as this time, that you will be alive and Sarah your wife will have a son." This is similar to what was said to Abraham, At this set time in the next year. The word ashuv will then be like, 'Veshav' (And) the Eternal your G-d (will bring back) thy captivity and have compassion upon thee and will return and gather thee.

OR HACHAIM

He said: "I will certainly come back to you, etc. The angel used the singular, indicating that each one of them had his own task. In view of this why did all three angels ask about Sarah's whereabouts? Perhaps they simply wanted to enquire from her husband about Sarah's wellbeing. According to the rules of etiquette then, all three angels enquired.

I will certainly return. The reason the angel repeated the words שוב אשוב and added the word והנה, may be better understood on the basis of a tradition that when Isaac was born he suffered from a congenital defect; he was sterile. It was only after agreeing to be the sacrifice at the עקדה, that he was cured of that defect. The angel hinted that he would have to return

twice כעת חיה, at a time when he would "give life," in order that Sarah's son would be a true son, able to procreate. The words והנה בן לשרה indicate that Sarah's son emanated from the left side of the emanations, the female, weaker side. The word והנה emphasises this origin of Isaac in Sarah's domain. Only when the angel would return once more would the male component, i.e. Abraham's input, become dominant within Isaac. This occurred in Genesis 22,11 where the Torah reports that an angel called out to Abraham not to harm Isaac. The angel therefore had two tasks to perform, 1) to announce that there would be an Isaac, 2) that he would possess a soul that could procreate. The reason that G'd had to do this was related to Abraham's prayer on behalf of Ishmael in 17,19. I have written about that subject at the time.

Another meaning of the words ולשרה בן, that Sarah would by then have a son, is to tell us that a son i.e. male issue, is dependent on the female element being predominant whereas daughters are the result of a preponderant male element during marital union. We know this from Nidah 31 based on Leviticus 12,2. The angel prophesied that the physical union of Abraham and Sarah which would result in her impregnation would correspond to the rules laid down, or hinted at, in Leviticus 12,2. [compare Midrash Hagadol in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak that the sex of the embryo is determined in accordance with whose orgasm occurs first. If the male completes his orgasm first, the result is a daughter, if the female is first, the result is a son. Ed.] Scripture alludes to who was first by the way the birth is described. Chronicles I 4 18, states: "and his wife, the Jewess, gave birth to Yered, etc." [Every other issue mentioned in that chapter is described in terms of the husband fathering instead of as the wife giving birth. Ed.] In Genesis 22,24 the repetition of "and his concubine whose name was Re-umah, etc.," is another example of the principle we described. The words "whose name was" were quite unnecessary otherwise. Accordingly, the angels attributed the forthcoming son to the predominance of the female, i.e. Sarah's input.

and Sarah was listening. On the one hand the verse indicates that what Sarah heard was a message intended for her by a heavenly messenger, the messenger himself standing behind her. Nonetheless I have seen a Midrash according to which the angel was disciplined for not addressing Sarah directly with the message, preferring to deliver it to Abraham. Angels are punished for inadvertently committed disobedience or minor deviations from the instructions they receive.

18:11 *Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women.*

RAMBAN

'BA'IM BAYAMIM' (ADVANCED IN DAYS). In his youthful days a man is called "standing in days," and they are referred to as "his days" because they belong to him, just as in verse The number of thy days will I fulfill. But when he gets old and has lived longer than most people of his generation, it is said of him that he is ba bayamim, [literally, "came into days"], because it is as if he came into another land, travelling from and arriving in a city each and every day.

IT HAD CEASED TO BE WITH SARAH AFTER THE MANNER OF WOMEN. This is the time of pregnancy, for after menstruation has ceased due to old age, a woman will not become pregnant.

18:13 *Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?'*

RAMBAN

I BEING OLD. This is the explanation of Sarah's words, after I am waxed old. And G-d's words [that Sarah had said, "I being old"], were true, but for the sake of peace He did not reveal what she also said, namely, My lord being old also, for [if He were quoting Sarah], He should have said, "I and my lord are old," as Sarah had laughed concerning both of them.

OR HACHAIM

? G'd said to Abraham: "why did Sarah laugh," etc? The word זה needs explaining. Furthermore, why did G'd say לאמר, "to say?" In fact most of the verse is superfluous; all the Torah had to write was: "Why did she laugh?"

We must consider that the Torah reported Abraham as laughing at a similar message in 17,17 when G'd promised him children. We do not find that G'd reacted to Abraham's laughter in that instance. The ordinary reader would want to know why Abraham could laugh at the same kind of message and not arouse G'd's anger whereas when Sarah did the same, it evoked criticism from G'd. Onkelos was aware of this when he used different words to describe Abraham's and Sarah's laughter respectively (חדי for Abraham's laughter, and חיכה to describe Sarah's laughter in our verse here). Why did G'd react differently to the same word, צחק when used by two different people?

Actually G'd's very reaction includes a hint of why He took exception to Sarah's laughter whereas He had not reacted at the time to Abraham's laughter. A close examination of the text will reveal that Abraham had reacted with (derisive) laughter at the time he received the message. Sarah, on the other hand, did not laugh until she had menstruated again, a clear sign that her youth had returned. She herself referred to her rejuvenation. This proves that she did not believe G'd's promise until after she experienced proof on her own body. It was this that G'd objected to. When G'd said: למה זה צחקה שרה, He emphasised to Abraham that this laughter of Sarah was objectionable, whereas Abraham's at the time had not bothered Him. By her comment after the event that she now realised she would indeed bear a child, האף אמנם אלד, ואני זקנתי, that now she was convinced she would bear a child despite her husband's age, Sarah showed that up until that time she had not believed G'd capable of arranging this.

and I am old! Why did G'd quote Sarah as saying something she had not said? While we are aware of our sages' statement in Baba Metzia 87 that we learn from this verse that a lie is acceptable when it serves to preserve domestic peace between man and wife, why would we have to learn this from an untrue utterance of G'd? In view of our explanation of G'd's reaction to the finer nuances of Sarah's laughter we see that G'd had indeed spoken the truth concerning what Sarah had said. Until Sarah had menstruated she had thought of herself as too old to conceive and bear a child (hence derisive laughter). After she had menstruated, her laughter was no longer one of derision or disbelief but one of joy. She was doubly grateful to G'd that although Abraham had not yet demonstrated signs of rejuvenation, he surely would do so now.

18:14 *Is anything too wondrous for the* LORD? *I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son."*

RAMBAN

IS ANYTHING TOO HARD ('HAYIPALEI') FOR THE ETERNAL? Is anything too hard and improbable for G-d to cause to happen? This expression is similar to the verse, For all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. Likewise, Out of Asher his fat bread, meaning "Out of Asher will come fat bread." Onkelos translated: "Is anything hidden?" He interpreted it as similar to the expression, If there arise a matter hidden ('yipalei') for thee in judgment. If so, there is a hidden secret here. Rashi's language: "Hayipalei, is anything apart and hidden from Me that I cannot do as I would wish?" Rashi has thus grafted together in [the word hayipalei] two separate concepts.

OR HACHAIM

I will return at the appointed time, etc. The reason that the angel repeated the promise was that Abraham should not think that because G'd had objected to Sarah's laughter G'd would take back His promise. This is why he said when exactly the promise would come true.

שני SECOND ALIYAH

18:15 *Sarah lied, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was frightened. But He replied, "You did laugh."*

RAMBAN

AND SARAH DENIED, SAYING. I wonder about the righteous prophetess: How did she deny that which G-d had said to the prophet, and also, why did she not believe in the words of G-d's angels? The answer appears to me to be that these angels who appeared as men came to Abraham, and he, in his wisdom, recognized them. They announced to him, "I will certainly return unto thee, and Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah heard it, but she did not know that they were angels of the Supreme One, as was the case with the wife of Manoah. It is even possible that she did not see them at all. Therefore she laughed within herself in derision, just [as the word "laugh" is used in the verse]: He that sitteth in heaven laugheth, the Eternal hath them in derision. For joyous laughter is [expressed in Hebrew as originating] in the mouth — Then was our mouth filled with laughter — but laughter originating in the heart is not spoken of as joyous. Now the Holy One, blessed be He, accused her before Abraham as to why the matter appeared to her to be impossible. It was fitting for her to believe, or she should have said, "Amen, G-d do so!" Now Abraham said to her, "Why did you laugh? Is anything too hard for the Eternal?" He did not explain to her that G-d had revealed her secret to him. And she, because of Abraham's fear of G-d, denied it for she thought that Abraham had said so through recognition of the expressions on her face or because she had kept quiet and gave no expression of praise and thanksgiving or joy. And he said to her, Nay, but thou didst laugh. Then she understood that it was told to him in a prophecy, and so she remained quiet and did not answer a word. It is proper that we also say that Abraham had not revealed to her what had originally been told to him: Indeed, Sarah, thy wife shall bear thee a son. Perhaps he waited until G-d would send her the announcement on the following day for he knew that the Eternal G-d will do nothing, but He revealed His counsel unto His servants the prophets. It may be that due to his great diligence in fulfilling commandments, he was occupied with his circumcision and the circumcision of the many people in his house. Afterward, on account of his weakness, he sat at the doorway of the tent, and the angels came before he had told her anything.

OR HACHAIM

Sarah denied, saying, etc. The reason the Torah reports Sarah as saying לאמור, as well as that she was afraid, is to show that Sarah was so righteous that she did not utter an outright lie saying: "I did not laugh." She merely said something, i.e. לאמור, from which one could deduce that she meant to deny that she had laughed. As to the reason why she was not truthful, the Torah adds that this was because she was afraid. The Torah affords us an insight into the psychology of a trusted servant who is reprimanded by his master after having inadvertently committed an offense. When said servant reflects on the enormity of his mistake by contrasting it with the exalted stature of his master, he denies his mistake. This very denial is equivalent to an admission but said servant lacks the moral courage to say so. It was Abraham who challenged Sarah by saying: "No, but you did laugh." He wanted her to make a confession of having laughed. Abraham was aware that what G'd wanted in such a situation was a specific confession. Our prophets have always urged us to confess, as per Proverbs 28,13: "he who confesses and abandons sin will find mercy."

18:17 *Now the* LORD *had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,*

RAMBAN

AND THE ETERNAL SAID. I.e., to the host of heaven standing by Him, or to the angel messengers. It is possible that the word amar (He said) refers to thought, meaning that He thought He should not keep it hidden from Abraham on account of these reasons. Similarly: I 'said,' in the noontide of my days I shall go; And he 'said' to slay David. Likewise all expressions of speaking within the heart refer to thought.

OR HACHAIM

G'd had said: "Should I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do? G'd chose the word המכסה deliberately. Abraham noted that the third angel had a mission which had so far not been revealed to him, in contrast with the missions of the other two angels which had become manifest to him already. One had come to heal him and the other to tell Sarah about her impending motherhood. Moreover, when the angels departed from him, Abraham noticed that two of them walked in the direction of Sodom. Abraham accompanied those two angels to see them off. He realised that these angels still had a mission to perform on earth, something which had been concealed from him. Abraham would become aware of those angels' mission after the event. G'd was concerned lest he would feel badly in retrospect if He would not now take him into His confidence. Our sages (Tanchuma item 5 on our portion) state that the reason G'd decided to take Abraham into His confidence was because Abraham entertained doubts about the justice of G'd having brought on the deluge. He found it impossible to believe that there had not been at least ten or twenty righteous people at that time. In his opinion G'd should have suspended judgment on their account. The words אשר אני עושה then mean: "as I am used to do," i.e. I do not destroy a nation unless there are no righteous people left.

G'd had another reason to reveal to Abraham what He had in mind for Sodom, seeing it had been Abraham who had saved the people of those cities at the risk of his own life when he rescued Lot. Inasmuch as Abraham thought that these people were safe, G'd thought He owed it to Abraham to inform him about His plans for them. He did not have to spell out what it was that He would conceal from Abraham as this is self-evident.

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

RAMBAN

AND ABRAHAM SHALL SURELY BECOME. A Midrash Agadah comments: The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing. Since He mentioned Abraham, He blessed him. The simple meaning of the verse though is, "Shall I conceal it from him since he is so beloved by Me to become a mighty nation?" Thus the language of Rashi. The correct interpretation is that G-d, blessed be He, spoke of the honor of Abraham, saying: "Behold, he is destined to become a great and mighty nation, and his memory will be a blessing among his seed and all nations of the earth. Therefore, I shall not conceal it from him for the future generations will say, "How could He hide it from him?' or, 'How could the righteous one be so callous about his close neighbors and have no mercy on them, not praying at all in their behalf, and that which was known to him, [i.e., that the cities will be destroyed], was good and pleasing!' For I know that he recognizes and is cognizant that I the Eternal loveth righteousness and justice, that is to say, that I do justice only with righteousness, and therefore he will command his children and his household after him to follow in his path. Now if it is possible in keeping with righteousness and justice to free the cities from destruction, he will pray before Me to let them go, and it will be well and good. And if they are completely guilty, he too will want their judgment. Therefore, it is proper that he enter in the council of G-d."

OR HACHAIM

For Abraham is going to be a great nation. Therefore I have to inform him that contrary to what he had thought, righteous people can save both themselves and the towns in which they live. This is the meaning of the last words in our verse, ונברכו בו כל גויי הארץ. The word בו refers back to the words "a great nation."

One may ask: "of what use is this promise to the nation that will follow Abraham?" G'd answers: "For I am aware that he will instruct his descendants, etc." G'd knew that Abraham would endeavour to teach his children to be good and to do good and to inform them about the ways of the Lord.

, in order that G'd would be able to fulfil for Abraham, etc. G'd announced here that the essential part of His fondness was not for Abraham's descendants but His fondness of Abraham personally. G'd's planning focused on how to ensure that He could fulfil all the promises He had made to Abraham concerning his descendants. Unless Abraham's descendants observed the paths of G'd this could not be guaranteed.

18:19 *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."*

RAMBAN

FOR I HAVE KNOWN HIM ('YEDATIV'), TO THE END ('LEMA'AN') THAT HE MAY COMMAND HIS CHILDREN. Rashi comments: "For I have known him, as the Targum takes it, is an expression denoting affection, just as A kinsman ('moda') of her husband's; And I know thee. Still the main connotation of all these expressions is that of knowing, for he who holds a person in affection and draws him to himself knows him well and is familiar with him. But if you explain it as the Targum does — i.e., "I know that he will command his children" — then the word lema'an (to the end) does not fit into the sense." It is possible that the word yedativ means "I have raised him and elevated him so that he shall command his children after him to do that which is right before Me, and therefore I will make him a great and mighty nation so that he should serve Me. In a similar sense are the verses: I know thee ('yedaticha') by name; What is man, that Thou knowest htm? Or the verse may be stating, I know that he will command, and in a similar sense is the verse, So that thine ox and thine ass may have rest (lema'an yanuach), meaning that he may have rest. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the word yedativ literally means "knowing." He is thus alluding that G-d's knowledge, which is synonymous with His Providence in the lower world, is to guard the species, and even the children of men are subject despite it to the circumstantial evil occurrences until the time of their visitation comes. But as regards His pious, He directs His Providence to know each one individually so that His watch constantly attaches to him, His knowledge and remembrance of him never departs, as it says: He withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous. There are many verses on this theme, as it is written, Behold, the eye of the Eternal is toward them that fear Him, and other verses besides.

18:20 *Then the LORD said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave!*

RAMBAN

AND THE ETERNAL SAID, THE CRY OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH. Rashi comments: "And the Eternal said to Abraham, thus doing what He had said, i.e., that He would not conceal the matter from him," And Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that the verse, And the men turned from there, was inserted in the middle of the account in order to let us know that at the time the angels arrived in Sodom, then G-d said to Abraham: The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great. The opinion of all commentators is likewise that G-d was speaking with Abraham. Now according to this, the correct interpretation of the verse, And the men turned from there, is that when G-d said to Abraham after the men journeyed from him, The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, Abraham stood in prayer and supplication before Him to forgive them and to give him permission to speak. And he prolonged his prayer until the men came to Sodom, and then Abraham drew near and said, Wilt Thou also sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Or the explanation may be that Scripture itself returns to clarify the expression, Abraham stood yet before the Eternal, as meaning that Abraham drew near and said, Wilt Thou also sweep away the righteous with

the wicked? Thus he prolonged his supplication before Him, saying each time, "Let not the anger of the Eternal blaze," and directing the intent of his mind each time towards prophecy until he heard an answer to his words direct from the Holy One, blessed be He. They continued in this manner the entire day [until, as the verse says], the Eternal finished speaking with Abraham, and the two angels came to Sodom.

THE CRY OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH. This is the cry of the oppressed, crying out and begging for help from the arm of their wickedness. It would have been proper for Scripture to say, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah I heard because it is great" or "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very heavy." But the purport of the verse is to state that "I will go down and see the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah and their sin which have become very great. If they have all sinned, I will bring the law to bear down on them, and if not, I will know who are the sinners." Concerning the matter of "going down and seeing," Rashi said by way of derash: "This teaches that judges are not to give decisions in cases involving capital punishment except after having carefully looked into the matter." According to the simple meaning of Scripture, the explanation is as follows: Since the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to reveal to Abraham the matter of Sodom and to inform him that there was none among them who did good, He said to him "Because it is great, the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah will I go down to see, meaning I have come to judge. If they have sinned, I will make an end of them, and if not, I shall know what I shall do to them: Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with strokes." He thus informed him that their judgment was not yet complete for now He will visit their sin and judge them. This is like the verse: The Eternal looketh from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any man of understanding, that did seek after G-d. They are all corrupt; they are together become impure. Now Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said concerning this ["going down and seeing"] a mystery [i.e., a mysterious explanation], pleasing himself with foreign offspring. I shall now intimate to you the opinion of those who received the truth. Our Rabbis have exposited from the verse, For behold, the Eternal cometh forth out of His place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth: "He cometh forth and goeth from attribute to attribute; He cometh forth from the attribute of mercy, and goeth to the attribute of justice." We interpret this matter similarly. And the Eternal said in His heart, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah, because it is great, I will go down from the attribute of mercy to the attribute of justice, and I will see in mercy if they have done according to the cry of it which is come unto Me through the attribute of justice, and if so, punishment; and if not, I will know and I will show mercy," just as in the verse, And G-d knew. Now after Scripture tells of the knowledge of the Most High, it returns to the first matter and relates the story of how the men who glanced towards Sodom with the intention of going there and whom Abraham sent away arrived there. And Abraham, from the moment they left him until they arrived there, still stood before the Eternal for He called him and told him that the angels were those messengers who would destroy the place, as He had said. It was not necessary for Scripture to explain when Abraham stood before Him for from the moment He said, Shall I conceal it from Abraham, it is known that He told him.

OR HACHAIM

G'd said: "the outcry about Sodom and Gomorrha is indeed great, etc.; the reason for the word כי, as well as the additional word חטאתם, plus the description כבדה מאד, require analysis. We must remember that in that era all the nations angered G'd by their conduct all the time. The wickedness of the Sodomites, however, was in a class by itself. This is indicated by the words כי רבה, "for it is great;" this explains why G'd seemed to mind the conduct of those cities more than that of any others. The additional word וחטאתם alludes to the fact that their wickedness included not only the metaphysical, i.e. idolatry, but also moral-ethical wickedness in their relations with fellow human beings. Sanhedrin 109 lists examples of the latter, describing how they tortured a young girl to death for having given bread to a stranger, something illegal in that town. The Torah itself alludes to their attempts to have homosexual relations with the angels who visited Lot in the guise of human beings.

G'd also wanted to cool Abraham's enthusiasm for saving such a wicked people. This is why He told him that their sins were both numerous and of a severe nature. Originally their sins were "merely" numerous i.e. רבה; meanwhile they had become "severe," כבדה, also. When Abraham rescued the Sodomites from the four kings their sins had not yet been that severe.

18:21 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

I will descend and have a look Myself, etc. We need to understand why G'd had "to descend." Is not the whole world like a grain of mustard in size compared to G'd so that the term "descend" loses its meaning when applied to G'd? The word הכצעקתה, "if as its outcry," also needs clarification. Does G'd have doubts about the accuracy of His own knowledge? Rashi says that the word teaches that a terrestrial court must not judge capital crimes except on the basis of eye-witnesses. If that is so, could we not have learned this already from Genesis 11,5 when G'd is described as descending prior to judging the generation which had built the Tower? Rashi himself made the same comment there as here!

G'd informed Abraham of the sequence in which he employs kindness and mercy with His creatures. Fairness would require that punishment takes into consideration the relative stature of the person who has been sinned against and that of the sinner. When a human being transgresses any commandment of his Creator, the Supreme Being, he and all his entourage deserves to be destroyed because of the stature of the One whom he sinned against. If G'd proceeds simply on the basis of the enormity of the crime because of the stature of the מתביש, the one who has been slighted, the outcome of such proceedings is a foregone conclusion. If, on the other hand, G'd considers the relative insignificance of the מביש, the human being who committed the crime, and He bases the judgment on arguments presented by both litigants, things might appear in a different light. In such a case even the people of the generation of the deluge might not have been found guilty of extinction. This is why G'd explains here to Abraham ארדה נא, "I will descend, i.e. I will not judge on the basis of My superior stature." I will keep in mind the inadequacies of the sinners themselves. We find something of this nature in Isaiah 43,26 where G'd offers: נשפטה יחד, "let Us judge on an equal basis," keeping in mind the inadequacies of

the creatures. G'd says: "If, after making full allowance for the inadequacies of any creature and ignoring My superior stature, the defendant still emerges as guilty, כלה, there is no escape for him. If not, I will know if they deserve to be judged by this or any other yardstick. G'd does not literally descend to earth to gain knowledge He did not have, but G'd lowers His profile in order to give the defendant an additional chance to downgrade his sin.

Another meaning of these words could be that though at the time G'd heard the outcry of the victims of the Sodomites and their guilt was then beyond doubt, He wanted to ascertain if their situation had remained the same and they continued their wicked lifestyle. The word ארדה נא then would indicate an immediate examination if these people had continued as before. If they intended to perform more such heinous acts their destruction would be imminent. This is why the angels spoke about destroying the cities in the present tense, i.e. משחיתים אנחנו (19,13). Until the attempt to sodomize Lot's guests, G'd used only the future tense about the fate of Sodom. Perhaps we may view the function of the angels in part as similar to that of the messengers of the court who warn a rebellious wife of the loss of her כתובה, the financial settlement she receives in the event her husband dies or divorces her without cause. We learn from Ketuvot 63 that public warnings were issued four weeks in a row before action was taken in such a case. The proclamation was designed to induce the wife to change her ways. The same may have been the case here. When the Torah describes the journey of the angels (18,22) as ויפנו משם, "they turned from there," the reference may have been to the heavenly tribunal where the decree had been issued. This may explain the two successive statements ארדה נא and ויפנו משם.

18:23 *Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty?*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAHAM DREW NEAR AND SAID, WILT THOU ALSO SWEEP AWAY THE RIGHTEOUS WITH THE WICKED? The anger of the Holy One, blessed be He, is His attribute of justice. Now Abraham thought that this would sweep away the righteous with the wicked, not knowing of G-d's thoughts in which He thought of them with His mercies, as I have explained. Therefore, Abraham said that it is proper and good that He should forgive the entire place because of the fifty righteous inhabitants, but it is inconceivable even according to the Divine attribute of Justice to slay the righteous with the wicked, for if so the righteous will be as the wicked, and they will say, It is vain to serve G-d. And all the more is this inconceivable according to the Divine attribute of Mercy since He is the Judge of all the earth, and He does justice, even as it is said, And the Eternal of hosts is exalted through justice, and we say in our prayers, "The King of judgment." This is the significance of the double use of the expression, It is unworthy of Thee. And the Holy One, blessed be He, conceded that He would forgive the entire place for the sake of the fifty righteous, for He will conduct Himself towards them with the attribute of Mercy. What informs you of all this is the fact vayomer hashem (And the Eternal said) is written with the Tetragrammaton, and all references by Abraham to the Divine Name are written Ado-noy. This has now been clarified.

OR HACHAIM

Abraham approached, etc. When G'd had mentioned כלה, He meant that all the people in Sodom were doomed by the attribute of Justice; should it be G'd's intention to save the individual good people by allowing them to escape as happened to Lot, Abraham argued that perhaps there would be a substantial number of such people, i.e. fifty. The words האף תספה, "Will You also wipe out, etc?" mean "will You still wipe out the wicked despite the presence of so many innocent people?" The presence of the fifty should protect the entire population against mass destruction. When Abraham referred to the fifty good people as בקרבה, in the midst of the city, he implied that they should not be made to move in order to be saved. G'd would do better to remove the guilty and destroy them elsewhere. He used the expression חלילה לך, "it would be a profanation of Your name," when he referred to the remote possibility that the innocent actually share the fate of the guilty; concerning his second request that the presence of the righteous should serve as an umbrella for the guilty, he realised that this would be an act of kindness, not justice.

When Abraham said והיה כצדיק כרשע, that the righteous would wind up just like the wicked, he indicated that if G'd applied the same yardstick to all creatures alike, the righteous would be deprived of every incentive to be righteous.

The second time Abraham used the expression חלילה לך, he referred to the second alternative of saving the wicked because of the presence of a substantial number of righteous people in their midst. Abraham did not want G'd to destroy the wicked under such circumstances. Another meaning of this plea could be that Abraham reminded G'd that He had sworn after the deluge not to bring on mass destruction on mankind by invoking the ultimate rigor of the attribute of Justice (compare our comments on Genesis 9,11).

18:24 *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?*

RAMBAN

FIFTY RIGHTEOUS. Rashi wrote: "Ten righteous men for each city. Wilt thou destroy on account of the five. Nine for each city, and You, the All-Righteous One of the Universe, will be counted with them [to make up the original number of ten]. Perhaps there shall be found there forty. Then let four cities be saved. So, too, thirty will save three of them, twenty will save two of them, and ten will save one of them. And he did not plead for less than ten since in the generation of the flood there were eight righteous people, and they could not save their generation. For nine, in association with G-d, he had already pleaded but found no acceptance." All these are the words of the Rabbi, of blessed memory. But I wonder: If so, what is this prayer and supplication which he pleads each and every time, saying, oh let not the Lord be angry; Behold, now, I have taken upon me to speak? It is proper that forty should save four cities, and thirty and twenty should save in proportion, just as fifty would save five! Similarly, concerning that which Rashi said, "for nine in association with G-d he had already pleaded but found no acceptance," it may be asked: When he pleaded about forty-five, [i.e., to save all five cities by having nine righteous men for each city] in association [with G-d to make up ten], and he did not find forty-five, but perhaps he might have found there nine! Now it would seem that the intention of the Rabbi is that many

righteous people can effect a proportionately greater salvation than a few righteous people can, just as the Sages have said: "A few who fulfill the commandments of the Torah cannot compare with the many who fulfill the commandments of the Torah." And thus, the Holy One, blessed be He, having conceded that forty-five righteous men in association with the All-Righteous One of the Universe would save all the five cities just as if there were the entire fifty, it follows that if forty could save four cities — in association with the Righteous One, praised be He — they would also save with even thirty and twenty, since He already conceded this association. [Thus, thirty-six would save four, twenty-seven three, eighteen two, and nine one]. And in case you say that He conceded only the case of forty-five because they are many, and perhaps He might not concede the principle of association with the few, as we have said, the refutation is that it is proper for the righteousness of G-d to associate even with the few and save [as many of the cities as possible] since He had conceded the principle of association, for He would not distinguish between the many and the few. This is the opinion of the Rabbi. But the way of the simple meaning of the verses is smooth. First Abraham said fifty in order to give a perfect number of ten for each city, and then he decreased the number as much as possible, and each time he thought to save all five cities. And I do not know who brought the Rabbi to that which he said.

18:26 *And the LORD answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake."*

RAMBAN

WITHIN THE CITY. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained that [these men for whose sake the cities were to be saved] fear G-d publicly. In a similar sense is the verse: Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that Abraham said, within the city, meaning that even if they are strangers therein, it is fitting that they save it. He said this on account of Lot, and he thought that perhaps there are others there.

OR HACHAIM

...ונשאחי לכל המקום. G'd said: "If I find fifty ....inside the town, I will forgive the whole place on their account. G'd answered only Abraham's last request. It goes without saying that He would not kill the innocent. We know that G'd saved Lot who was not righteous because he was a relative of Abraham.

18:28 *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."*

RAMBAN

I WILL NOT DESTROY IT IF I FIND THERE. He assured him that He would not destroy it if that number of righteous men will be found there. And He did not tell him, "Know that there is not such a number there as you said," since their trial had not been completed, just as He said, I will go down now, and see. Now Abraham did not know what would be done to them. Therefore, he rose early in the morning and looked towards Sodom, and upon seeing that they were destroyed, he knew that the required number of righteous men had not been there.

OR HACHAIM

Perhaps there will be five short? Abraham implied that inasmuch as G'd was righteous He would make up the tenth in each of the five towns which had only nine righteous men in their own right. The assumption underlying all this is that at least a quorum of ten is needed in each town for those ten good men to provide protection for their town.

18:29 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

Abraham continued to speak to Him (G'd). This is a continuation of the prayer that G'd Himself should act as the one making up the requisite quorum. The expression ויוסף...אליו means that Abraham continued in the same vein adding that G'd's making up the quorum would apply even if not all the towns would could be saved by that method.

18:30 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

He said "Let my Lord not become angry. The reason that Abraham was concerned about G'd becoming angry this time was because he tried to add his own merit to make up the quorum of ten in one of the towns in case this was all that was lacking, whereas G'd would make up the quorum in the other towns. Abraham used the word נא again because he introduced a new element, i.e. use of his own merit as a protective factor. [The author may have deduced the principle that Abraham injected his own merit here because of the absence of the word אליו when he speaks to G'd. I believe the novelty of the author's approach is that he believed that throughout the dialogue reported by the Torah Abraham did not abandon the attempt to save all five cities. Ed.]

18:31 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

He said: "Here I have already dared to speak. Abraham pleads here that G'd's merit should protect twenty of the thirty righteous men whereas his own merit should suffice to protect the people in a third location by complementing the quorum of ten. Seeing that Abraham did not introduce a new element this time, he did not worry about G'd becoming angry at his being presumptuous. The emphasis on אל ה was to underline that he did not try to expand what he considered his own merit. [I believe that in order to understand the author one must assume that the twenty mentioned in the verse do not need additional protection. All that Abraham worried about was the three towns which did not have ten good people each to protect them. Ed.]

18:32 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

...אך הפעם. "Do not become angry if I speak only this one more time. Here Abraham again introduces his own merit as adequate to complement the quorum of twenty people (2 towns); this is why he worries about angering G'd. In this instance he was presumptuous enough to equate the protective power of his own merit with that of his Master. This is reflected in his avoidance of the words: "to my Lord;" he merely said: "I will speak," meaning a plea relying on his own merit. He added the word אך to indicate that he would not plead again if by chance the tenth one should be missing even in the remaining town.

18:33 *When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed; and Abraham returned to his place.*

OR HACHAIM

When G'd completed speaking with Abraham He left. The Torah reports that G'd did not even give Abraham a chance to plead further on behalf of a lesser number of righteous people. After all, Abraham said that he had used his final plea. Although the Zohar 1,82 suggests that the righteous is the foundation of the earth, i.e. that a single righteous person could save the rest of the world, this may apply only to an outstanding צדיק. Perhaps if Abraham had lived in Sodom, his presence could have sufficed to save the town.

שלישי THIRD ALIYAH

19:1 *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,*

OR HACHAIM

...בערב. They arrived in the evening. The reason for this whole story of the angels being hosted by Lot was to afford Lot the opportunity to justify his being saved. Although Bereshit Rabbah 50,11 attributes Lot's escape to Abraham's merit, we still need to find some redeeming feature in Lot's conduct to understand the efforts made by G'd to save him. Had the angels arrived at Sodom in daylight Lot would have lacked the moral courage to offer them hospitality even by devious means.

Lot saw and rose to meet them. This means that Lot recognised that these people were of the type familiar to him as ministering angels of the Lord when he still travelled with Abraham. Because Lot realised this he was prepared to take risks for their sake against the inhabitants of his town. He told them to wash their feet, a custom he had learned from the way Abraham conducted himself with his guests. The Torah reports the details to show the difference between Abraham and Lot. Abraham commenced with his guests washing their feet, Lot suggested they sleep first. Lot did not mind if people who were idolators entered his home without first removing the traces of idolatry, something that Abraham was very particular about.

19:2 *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."*

RAMBAN

BEHOLD NOW, MY LORDS. Rashi comments: "Behold now you are my lords since you have passed by me" The correct interpretation is that it is an expression of pleadings: "My lords, behold now your servant's house; turn aside, I pray you, to me" The word suru (turn aside) is as in the expressions: Turn aside ('surah'), sit down here; Turn in ('surah'), my lord, turn in to me; fear not.

AND YE SHALL RISE UP EARLY, AND GO ON YOUR WAY. The purport of that was to tell them that they should not tarry in the city after the morning for Lot knew the nature of the men of the city and of their wickedness, but he thought, In the morning light they do it. It may be that he saw them as transients who would not tarry in the city, and so he said, And ye shall rise up early and go on your way if you desire.

OR HACHAIM

and rise early and be on your way. Lot hinted to the angels that they had to hide from the local population because he was afraid that something like what happened might indeed occur, i.e. that his guests would be molested.

19:3 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND HE URGED THEM GREATLY. His urging them was meritorious on the part of Lot, and he indeed had a sincere desire to welcome wayfarers. They, however, at first refused in order to increase his merit, and therefore they finally listened to him; but originally they did not want to come into his house as he was not a perfectly righteous man. But our Rabbis have said [in order to explain their original refusal]: "One may decline an offer from an inferior person, but not from a superior person." If so, their declining his offer at first was merely an act of ethical conduct.

OR HACHAIM

He prepared a feast for them. The correct meaning of the verse is that while Lot prepared a meal for them the angels ate only matzot. This was because Lot did not observe the commandments of the Torah as did Abraham. At Abraham's home the angels had no compunction about eating meat. The angels either knew that Lot had tithed the flour he used for baking the matzot, or they reasoned that in the absence of priests to give the tithe (תרומה) to, they assumed that function themselves and ate the part which could be considered terumah whereas they did not eat the regular matzah. According to our sages (Midrash Hagadol), the date was the 16th of Nissan and Lot had baked matzah in anticipation of the eventual Passover holiday some 400 years hence.

19:4 *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.*

OR HACHAIM

Before they went to sleep. The Torah is careful not to write: "after they had eaten, etc." From this we learn that something transpired between Lot and the angels after the time they completed the meal and before their retiring for the night. Our sages in Bereshit Rabbah 50,5 mention that when questioned about the townspeople by the angels Lot said that whereas all over the world there are both good and wicked people in a town, in Sodom the people were mostly wicked. We have previously explained why the angels did not immediately destroy the town when they heard this. Besides, according to the Midrash, Lot asked them to spare the city and they accepted his plea. It was only after they were about to add further sins (verse 5) to their already full register that the angels told Lot to save himself and his relatives (verse 12) prior to their destroying the city. There was an additional reason why the angels did not immediately destroy the town. They waited till morning, a period when the attribute of Mercy is in the ascendancy; at that time they would succeed in saving Lot. They could not have done this during the night. Our sages add that since the Sodomites worshipped both sun and moon they were smitten at a time when the moon is full (middle of the month) and the sun shone, to show that neither force protected them.

19:5 *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."*

RAMBAN

AND WE SHALL KNOW THEM. Their intention was to stop people from coming among them, as our Rabbis have said, for they thought that because of the excellence of their land, which was as the garden of the Eternal, many will come there, and they despised charity. Lot, however, came to them with his riches and wealth [and was given permission to live in Sodom because] he either asked permission of them, or that they accepted him in honor of Abraham. Now Scripture testifies that this was the intent of the people of Sodom, as it is said, Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and careless ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. The verse stating, And the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the Eternal exceedingly, really means that they continued provoking and rebelling against Him with their ease and the oppression of the poor. It is this thought which Scripture expresses by saying, And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. In the opinion of our Rabbis, all evil practices were rampant among them. Yet their fate was sealed because of this sin — i.e., they did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy — since this sin represented their usual behavior more than any other. Besides, since all peoples act righteously towards their friends and their poor, there was none among all the nations who matched Sodom in cruelty. Know that the judgment of Sodom was due to the superiority of the Land of Israel since Sodom is part of the inheritance of the Eternal, and it does not suffer men of abominations. And just as it later vomited out a whole nation on account of their abominations, so it now anticipated and saw that this entire people behaved worse than all nations towards Heaven and mankind. It thus laid waste heaven and earth for them, and the land was destroyed forever, never to be restored, since they became haughty on account of the goodness that was bestowed on them. The Holy One, blessed be He, thus made Sodom a token against the rebellious children, that is, against the children of Israel who were destined to inherit it, even as He warned them: The whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and a burning... like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Eternal overthrew in His anger, and in His wrath. For there have been among nations those who were evil and exceedingly sinful, and yet He did not do to them as He did to Sodom. However it was all on account of the superiority of this land for there is the temple of the Eternal. I plan to explain this in Seder Achrei Moth, if He Who taketh life and giveth life will sustain me in life.

19:8 *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."*

RAMBAN

LET ME, I PRAY YOU, BRING THEM OUT UNTO YOU. From the praise of this man Lot we have come to his disgrace: he made every effort on behalf of his guests in order to save them because they came under the shadow of his roof, but he is ready to appease the men of the city by abandoning his daughters to prostitution! This bespeaks nothing but an evil heart for it shows that the matter of prostitution of women was not repugnant to him, and that in his opinion he would not be doing such great injustice to his daughters. It is for this reason that our Rabbis have said, "It is the custom of the world that a man fights to the death for the honor of his daughters and his wife, to slay or to be slain, but this man hands over his daughters for dishonor. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him, 'It is for yourself that you keep them.'" Now Lot was fearful [for the welfare of the angels] as he thought that they were men, but when they smote the men of the city with blindness and they said to him, For we will destroy this place... and the Eternal hath sent us, then he recognized them and believed in doing whatever they commanded him. Know and understand that the matter of the concubine of Gibeah, even though it resembles this affair, does not attain the degree of evil of the inhabitants of Sodom. Those wicked ones of Gibeah had no intention of stopping people from coming among them. Rather, they were steeped in immorality and desired sexual relations with the wayfarer, and when he brought his concubine out to them, they were satisfied with her. The old man [who had invited the wayfarer to his house] and who said to the men of Gibeah, Behold, here is my daughter, a virgin, and his concubine; I will bring them out now... and do with them what seemeth good unto you, knew that they would not want his daughter and that they would not harm her. This was why they refused to listen to him. And when he finally turned his concubine alone outdoors to them, they ceased molesting him. Now the master of the house, as well as the guest, both wanted to save the man through his concubine, as a concubine does not have the status of a man's wife. Besides, she had already played the harlot against him. In that breach, too, not all of the men of the city were involved as they were in Sodom, concerning which it is said, Both young and old, all the people from every quarter, while of Gibeah it is said, Behold,

the men of the city, certain base fellows — only some of them, those who were the rulers and strong men of the city, even as the man said in relating the incident, And the masters of Gibeah rose against me. This was why the others did not protest against them. Now the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel wanted to erect a great guard in the matter of immorality by slaying them, as it is said, Now therefore deliver up the men, the base fellows that are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death. It is clear that according to the law of the Torah they were not guilty of the death-penalty as they had done no deed exclusive of the torture of the concubine — harlot. They did not intend her death, nor did she die at their hands for they let her go at the approach of dawn, and she walked from them to her master's house and after that she died, weakened perhaps by her numerous violations, and chilled while lying at the door until it was light, and there she died. But because the men of Gibeah had wanted to do a shameful deed just as the men of Sodom, the tribes saw fit "to make a fence unto the Torah" so that this should never again happen or be contemplated in Israel, even as they said, And that we may put away evil from Israel. This judgment has its origin in the principle which our Rabbis have stated: "The Court may administer stripes and the death penalty which are not authorized by the Torah. However, they may not do this [with the intent of instituting a law which] transgresses the words of the Torah but only for the purpose of erecting a fence around the Torah." The tribe of Benjamin, however, did not consent to this as they were not guilty of the death-penalty for violating the concubine. Perhaps the Benjamites were also provoked by the fact that the tribes did not communicate with them first and reached a consensus without asking for their opinion. In my opinion, this [failure to consult Benjamin] caused Israel's punishment which resulted in their being routed at first since the war was done not in accordance with the law. The obligation of making "the fence" lay upon the tribe of Benjamin, and not upon them, as it is the tribe itself that is obligated to judge its constituents. Thus both parties were deserving of punishment. Benjamin sinned by not bothering to punish the wicked ones or even rebuke them. Israel sinned by making war not in accordance with the law, and they asked not counsel at the mouth of the Eternal on this matter. Instead they questioned G-d and said, Who shall go up for us first to battle against the children of Benjamin? They themselves had decided to do battle in any case. Similarly, they did not inquire concerning the outcome of the battle, "If Thou wilt give them into my hand," since they relied on their man-power which was exceedingly great as they were now more than ten times [as numerous as the Benjamites]. All they asked was, Who shall go up for us first, this being like casting lots among them. Perhaps each tribe was saying, "I will not go up first," or each tribe was saying, "I will be first." And the Holy One, blessed be He, answered in accordance with their question: Judah first, meaning Judah is always first, For He hath chosen Judah to be prince. This was why He did not say, "Judah shall go up," as in other places, for He did not give them permission. However, He did not stop them, and neither did he tell them, Go not up, neither fight, because of the merited punishment of the Benjamites. Thus did G-d walk with both of them by chance, leaving them to natural circumstances. Accordingly, the Benjamites, who were valiant men and whose cities were well fortified, destroyed the Israelites who had "made flesh their arm of strength." But now the Benjamites compounded their merited punishment. It would have been sufficient for them to drive the Israelites away from Gibeah. Instead, they killed them, seeking to destroy them by a perpetual hatred, and they slew the mighty number of twenty-two thousand of their people. Now when the Israelites suffered such a great defeat they became aware of their error, namely, that they did battle with their brethren without receiving Divine permission and engaged in a battle which was not in accordance with the law of the Torah. Therefore, on the second day they asked, shall I again draw nigh to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? Now they mentioned the brotherhood among them, asking whether He forbids them to do battle. But now on the second day, G-d permitted them, saying, Go up against him, as it was now permissible for them to avenge the spilled blood of their brethren. However, they did not ask whether they will be victorious because they were still relying upon their superior numbers to bring victory under all circumstances. But since G-d had explained to them only that the battle was permissible to them, and since their first sin had not yet been atoned for, there fell among them also on the second day eighteen thousand. On the third day they decreed a fast, and they fasted and they wept... before the Eternal, and they offered burnt-offerings to atone for their sinful thoughts through which they relied upon the strength of their arm. They also offered peace-offerings, which were Thanksgiving peace-offerings, since they considered themselves as if they had all escaped from the sword of Benjamin. This indeed is the law of all who are delivered from danger: they are to bring a thanks-offering, just as it is said, And let them offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with singing, and it is further written, And now shall my head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; and I will offer in His tabernacle sacrifices with trumpet-sound; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Eternal. Now the number of dead among the Israelites during the two days was forty thousand, and in the end twenty-five thousand of Benjamin's warriors fell, besides those that were put to the sword from the whole city and all that they found. It is possible that among the men, women and children they totalled fifteen thousand additional casualties, thus making the punishment of the two groups equal. And how significant are the words of our Rabbis who said that the anger of G-d at that time was due to the idol of Micah! "Said the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Concerning My honor, which was violated by those guilty of death and those who raised their hand against the principle of religion, namely, the unity of G-d, you did not protest; but for the honor of a mortal you did protest, to an extent which exceeded the limits of justice!" Therefore He confounded the counsel of the two groups and made their hearts stubborn, and they remembered not the brotherly covenant. But after the affair they had regrets, just as it is said, And the people came to Beth-eland sat there till evening before G-d, and lifted up their voice, and wept bitterly. And they said: O Eternal, G-d of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe missing from Israel? For now they realized their mistakes and punishment. We have thus incidentally explained a concealed matter which is not clear [with a cursory reading of the text], and we have mentioned the cause thereof.

19:9 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND THEY PRESSED HARD ('VAYIFTZERU') UPON THE MAN, EVEN LOT. I have found this word vayiftzeru only in connection with words of pleading. If so, we will explain its usage here as follows: the men of Sodom begged him [Lot] exceedingly to open the door for them, and when he refused to do so, they approached in order to break it. It may be that he stood in front of the door, not letting them come near him, and they begged him to turn aside as they did not want to harm him. This is the meaning of their saying, Stand back, meaning "stand in another place."

19:12 *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.*

RAMBAN

SON-IN-LAW, AND THY SONS, AND THY DAUGHTERS. Rashi comments: "Whom else of your family have you in the city besides your wife and daughters who are at home with you? If you have additionally a son-in-law, or sons and daughters, take them out from this place." Now if so, they [the angels] spoke in the manner of ordinary people for Lot had no sons, only daughters. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained: "Son-in-law, and thy sons — sons-in-law who are [as dear to you] as your sons." It is possible that Lot had grown sons who were married, and he spoke with his sons-in-law first as he thought that his own sons would listen to him [and leave the place]. But as his sons-in-law laughed at him and their conversation continued, dawn appeared, and the angels only permitted him to take those who were at hand. Thus the merit of Lot could have saved his sons and daughters and sons-in-law, not as Abraham had thought that He would make the righteous perish with the wicked. It is clear that the angels were acquainted with the knowledge of the Most High on this matter since the city of Zoar was also saved by his prayer. It is possible that [the salvation of Lot's family was not on account of his merit but] was in honor of his hospitality for it is the ethical way of messengers to save their host and all that belong to him, just as the messengers of Joshua also saved all the families of their hostess. And in Bereshith Rabbah it is said, "Because Lot honored the angel by offering him hospitality, he in turn befriended Lot."

19:13 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

For we are about to destroy this place. Although only one of them had been entrusted with that task, the angels used the plural seeing that they were both together. Otherwise the other angel would have appeared as if he was only an assistant. Possibly, whenever the Torah speaks of the (avenging) angel Gabriel it is understood that the reference is not only to him personally, but includes his army. Alternatively, since Gabriel was not free to act until the angel Raphael had secured Lot's escape their activities were dependent on one another.

19:16 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND THE MEN LAID HOLD UPON HIS HAND. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that the word vayachziku (and they laid hold upon) clearly shows that Lot was afraid and had no strength to flee. The correct interpretation of the word is that it is like the verse, 'Vatechezak' (And) the Egyptians (were urgent) upon the people, to send them out of the land in haste. Here likewise they were pulling them with strength to send them out in haste.

THE ETERNAL HAVING PITY UPON HIM. Not for Lot's merit but only because of G-d's pity and His abundant mercies. It may be that the verse is saying that they seized him to take them out while G-d's pity was still upon him, lest the wrath go forth from G-d and he perish.

OR HACHAIM

The men took hold of his hand. Although only one of them was charged with saving Lot, the other one could not proceed with his task pending Lot's rescue. Perhaps we should see in Raphael the principal agent of Lot's rescue; in that case the fact that Gabriel assisted (by taking Lot by his hand) is not viewed as his performing an additional task. This is especially so because Gabriel helped Lot only in order to be able to carry out his assignment of destroying the city (seeing he did not have permission to do so while Lot was within its borders).

19:17 *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."*

RAMBAN

LOOK NOT BEHIND THEE, NEITHER STAY IN ALL THE PLAIN. The purport of the verse is to state: "Do not stay in all the Plain and do not look behind you after you have been saved." For as long as Lot had not reached the mountain, disaster would not overtake the inhabitants of Sodom. It is for this reason that Lot said, "And I cannot escape to the mountain, lest the evil overtake me when I am in the Plain since you will not extend the time for me more than a little, as you have said, Haste thee, escape thither." Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said, "Look not behind thee, i.e., 'thou and all who belong to thee.' And similarly is the verse, Thou shalt not eat of it." But what need is there for this interpretation? The punishment here was not because they would violate the warning of the angel by looking at them. Instead, the angel merely warned them on his own that punishment would overtake them for such a glance, and he warned Lot because of his merit, and all who listened and took warning saved their lives. Now as to the significance of the prohibition of looking, Rashi said: "You sinned with them but art saved through the merit of Abraham. You are not permitted to see their doom." There is yet another matter. Looking upon the atmosphere of a plague and all contagious diseases is very harmful, and they may cleave to him. Even the thought of them is harmful. Therefore, the leper is isolated and dwells

alone. Similarly, those who have been bitten by mad animals such as a mad dog and other animals besides, when they look into the water or any mirror, they behold in them the likeness of the offender, and as a result of this, they did just as the Rabbis have said in Tractate Yoma, and as the students of nature have mentioned. It was for this reason that Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt for the plague entered her mind when she saw the brimstone and salt which descended upon them from heaven, and it cleaved to her. I am inclined to say that when G-d destroyed these cities the destroying angel stood between the earth and heaven, appearing in a flame of fire, as did the destroying angel whom David saw. Therefore, he prohibited them from looking. In Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer there is a similar text: "The angels said to them, 'Do not look behind you since the Divine Presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, has descended to rain brimstone and fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah.' The compassion of Edis, Lot's wife, welled up for her married daughters who were in Sodom, and she looked behind her to see if they were following her. She thereupon saw the back of the Divine Presence, and she became a pillar of salt."

OR HACHAIM

do not look behind you! The reason for this is simple. We believe that by looking at a person's face one (a צדיק) can detect whether he is good or evil. If Lot were to turn his face towards the city his sins would be reflected on his face and there would be no way he could have been spared.

19:20 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

This town is nearby, etc. The verse is difficult. If the inhabitants of that town were guilty, what difference did it make that it was close by? Moreover, how could the angel say: "I have granted your wish?" Since when was it up to him? If the town was innocent, who had given the angel permission to destroy it even if Lot had not pleaded on its behalf?

We must view the situation in light of the Talmud Shabbat 10 that Tzoar was only 51 years old, whereas the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were founded 52 years previously. Lot knew this and reasoned that Tzoar's measure of guilt was not full as yet. We also have a principle (Baba Kama 60) that once permission has been granted to the destructive angel to execute G'd's judgment, it does not really matter whether the measure of guilt is full. However, the angel Gabriel was then in a position to exercise some discretion. Lot was aware of this and appealed to Gabriel's discretionary powers. Lot left Tzoar as soon as possible because he was afraid that the time limit for the angel's discretionary power would elapse.

רביעי FOURTH ALIYAH

19:24 *the* LORD *rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the* LORD *out of heaven.*

RAMBAN

AND THE ETERNAL CAUSED TO RAIN UPON SODOM (AND UPON GOMORRAH BRIMSTONE AND FIRE FROM THE ETERNAL OF HEAVEN). Rashi wrote: "Wherever it is said, And the Eternal it means Him and His Celestial Court. From the Eternal. It is not written 'from Him,' [with the pronoun 'Him' replacing the noun 'Eternal' in the second part of the verse, for] this is the Scriptural way of speaking. For example, Ye wives of Lamech, and he did not say 'my wives.' And David also said, Take you the servants of your lord, and he did not say, 'my servants.' Ahaseurus also said, Write ye... in the name of the king, and he did not say, 'in my name.'" Now I wonder about the Rabbi who wrote down conflicting opinions and made them alike for there is a division of opinion on this matter in Bereshith Rabbah. And there is yet a third opinion: "Aba Chilfi, the son of Rabbi Simki, said in the name of Rabbi Yehudah the son of Rabbi Simon: 'And the Eternal caused to rain upon Sodom — this refers to the angel Gabriel. From the Eternal out of heaven — this refers to the Holy One, blessed be He.' Rabbi Eleazar said, 'Wherever it says, And the Eternal, it means Him and His Celestial Court.' Rabbi Yitzchak said, 'We find in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, that a person mentions his name twice. In the Torah, And Lamech said to his wives, etc.'" Thus there are three conflicting opinions here. Rabbi Yehudah the son of Rabbi Simon ascribes the first Divine Name mentioned in the verse as referring to Gabriel as he was the messenger sent to destroy the city, it being a case of the deputy being referred to by the name of Him Who sent him. And Rabbi Eleazar said that He and His Celestial Court agreed on the judgment, and it was from Him that the brimstone and fire came. And Rabbi Yitzchak said that it is the Scriptural way of speaking. Now if you will understand what I have written above, you will know the intent of the Sages' expression, "He and His Celestial Court," and then the plain meaning of the verse will be clear to you. In a similar manner is the verse, That they may keep the way of the Eternal... to the end that the Eternal may bring... He did not say, "that they may keep My way... to the end that I may bring." Likewise: Because the cry concerning them is great before the face of the Eternal, and the Eternal hath sent us. And similarly: And it came to pass, when G-d destroyed... that G-d remembered.

19:26 *Lot's wife looked back, and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.*

RAMBAN

AND HIS WIFE LOOKED BACK FROM BEHIND HIM. From behind Lot, who was following them, acting as the rearguard for all his household, who were hurrying to be saved.

19:29 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND G-D REMEMBERED ABRAHAM, AND SENT LOT OUT FROM THE CATASTROPHE. The purport of this verse is that Lot had shown kindness towards the righteous one by going with him and roaming here and there, following him wherever he went. This is the intent of the verse, And Lot went with him, meaning that he went at Abraham's command. Therefore he had the merit to be saved on account of Abraham's meritoriousness as it was on account of him that he lived in Sodom, and were it not for Abraham he would have still been in Haran with his family. Now it is inconceivable that some evil should over-

take him [Lot] because of Abraham who had left his country at his Creator's command. This was also the reason why Abraham endangered himself by pursuing the kings on account of him.

19:30 *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.*

RAMBAN

FOR HE FEARED TO DWELL IN ZOAR. Rashi wrote, "Because it was near to Sodom." This is not so. Rather, since it was one of the places upon which destruction had originally been decreed and it was only by Lot's supplication that the angel exempted it because Lot could not make his escape to the mountain on that day, Lot now thought that the angel would no longer extend his request, for he now had sufficient time to make the escape to the mountain. This was why his daughter said, And there is not a man in the earth, for she thought that with her father's departure from Zoar the city was destroyed.

19:31 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND THE FIRST-BORN SAID. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said, "It is possible that Lot had another wife who died before." But there is no need for this; the first-born is just in contrast to the younger. In fraternal relations the one who is older is called "first-born," and all those younger than he are called "the younger ones." Thus the first fruits of the year are called bikurim; likewise, the first-born of the poor, meaning the most destitute, the poor of the poor. Likewise, With the loss of his first-born shall he lay the foundation thereof, and with the loss of his younger shall he set up the gates of it. Onkelos also here translated, rabtha.

19:32 *Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father."*

RAMBAN

THAT WE MAY KEEP ALIVE SEED FROM OUR FATHER. The intent is perhaps that they said: "Let us do what we can, so that G-d should have mercy, and we shall give birth to a boy and a girl from whom the world shall be sustained, for the world will be built with kindness, and it is not in vain that G-d has saved us." Now they were modest and did not want to tell their father to marry them, as a Noachide is permitted to take his daughter. It may be that the matter was extremely repulsive in the eyes of the people of those generations and was never done. Our Rabbis, in Agadic expositions, likewise discredit Lot very much.

20:2 *Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAHAM SAID OF SARAH HIS WIFE, SHE IS MY SISTER. This was not like what happened in Egypt. There, when they entered the land, it is said that the Egyptians saw that the woman was beautiful, and they praised her to the lords and to Pharaoh, as they were an immoral people but this king was perfect and upright, and his people were likewise good. However Abraham suspected them, and he told everyone that she was his sister.

AND ABIMELECH, KING OF GERAR, SENT AND TOOK SARAH. It is wondrous that Sarah, after being worn with age, was extremely beautiful, fit to be taken by kings. When she was taken to Pharaoh, though she was sixty-five years old, it is possible that she still had her beautiful appearance, but after being worn with age and the manner of women had ceased with her, that is a wonder! Perhaps her youthfulness returned to her when the angel brought her the tidings, as our Rabbis have said.

OR HACHAIM

Abraham said about Sarah, etc. This time Abraham did not ask Sarah to be the first to announce that she was Abraham's sister as he had done when they travelled to Egypt. Then he had been motivated by the ugliness of the Egyptians and the contrast with Sarah's white skin which aroused the lust of the Egyptians. The people in Geror did not look different from Abraham and Sarah. Also, their general sexual mores were superior to that of the Egyptians. Avimelech himself felt justified in challenging Abraham's deception if it were based on such suspicions. Pharaoh had not dared to ask such a question. This is also the reason that Avimelech agreed that Abraham reside in his country, something the King of Egypt could not afford to do.

20:3 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

Here you are going to die on account of the woman you have taken. The meaning is "after I reveal to you that she is married you will be guilty of death." Had G'd not informed Avimelech of Sarah's true status as a married woman, he would not have been guilty of death even if he had slept with her. Any Gentile who sleeps with a woman whom he has reason to believe to be single is innocent of adultery. Maimonides explains this in Hilchot Melachim 9,5.

The verse may also be understood as telling Avimelech that he was guilty of death having taken Sarah while aware that she was married. However, it is more likely that at the time Avimelech had not known this.

20:4 *Now Abimelech had not approached her. He said, "O Lord, will You slay people even though innocent?*

OR HACHAIM

Avimelech had not been intimate with her. According to Maimonides Hilchot Melachim 9,7 a Gentile who engages in sexual inercourse with someone else's wife is only guilty of death if the act was performed in the normative manner. If such a Gentile indulges in intercourse with a Jewish woman however, he is guilty of death regardless of the manner in which the sexual act is performed. The Torah indicates that Avimelech was aware of this distinction and that he refrained from touching Sarah because he was afraid she might be married to Abraham the Jew.

Are You killing nations even when they are righteous? Why did Avimelech use the word גוי when he spoke about himself? Why did he say גם צדיק, "also the righteous?" The term תהרוג seems inappropriate seeing G'd gave him the option to return Sarah to Abraham untouched.

The matter will become clear in conjunction with Berachot 64 on Kings I 22,17: "they will each return to his house in peace." The prophet Michayu uses the word בשלום instead of לשלום. The former is used when one speaks of the dead. Even though only

king Achav died in that battle, the euphemism for death is applied to the entire nation. This teaches that when the king is in distress the whole nation is considered as being in distress. Here too Avimelech's statement reflects the same sentiment. His own problem becomes a national problem. By the same token Avimelech felt that if he personally was righteous this reflected on his entire people; it follows that if G'd were to kill him for a crime he had not committed, G'd would, in effect, kill a whole nation that was innocent. Moreover, he was afraid that G'd would kill him for having taken Sarah even without having slept with her. He added that even if he had slept with her while unaware that she was married, he would not have to face the death penalty, seeing Abraham himself had described her as "my sister."

Alternatively, Avimelech thought that G'd had accused him of taking Sarah knowing she was married. He denied this vehemently.

20:5 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

I acted with innocence and integrity. Avimelech said these words in the event Sarah was married, but not to Abraham. He claimed that if that were so what would Abraham have gained by declaring that she was his sister? This exonerated him from the death penalty, i.e. בתם לבבי. When he added בנקיון כפי, he pleaded that he was not guilty of the death penalty for robbery either, though we have a ruling both in Sanhedrin 57 and in Maimonides (the chapter quoted above) that a Gentile who commits robbery is guilty of the death penalty. It does not matter that the robbery is an act of kidnapping as distinct from stealing. The Talmud deduces this when it discusses the status of a prisoner of war who is considered as the victim of robbery or stealing. Accordingly, from the moment Avimelech took Sarah against her will he became guilty of the death penalty. Avimelech claimed that he thought both Abraham and Sarah were pleased at his taking Sarah for a wife. After all, he was the king and it meant social climbing for them both.

20:6 *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.*

OR HACHAIM

G'd said to him (Avimelech). He agreed that Avimelech had not yet become guilty of death considering he had been convinced that Sarah was not married. As to his integrity, however, this was another matter. Whereas he might not have literally "robbed" Sarah [i.e. she did not belong to Abraham. Ed.], nonetheless he had employed the authority of being the king which is a kind of violence. At the very least "his hands were not clean in the matter."

I too saved you from sinning. G'd made it plain that when He said that Avimelech was going to die, He meant that if he did not restore Sarah to Abraham but would sleep with her. He had told him of Sarah's status now and thus given him a chance to save himself from sinning.

from committing a sin against Me. Although Avimelech would not have been guilty of death had he slept with Sarah before becoming aware of her status as a married woman, nonetheless he would have sinned against G'd inasmuch as G'd was especially fond of both Abraham and Sarah and any offence against them would have been an offence against G'd Himself. This is why G'd added the word לי, "against Me."

this is why I did not give you a chance, etc. Because of the special circumstances involved, I prevented you from sleeping with her; had you known she was married you would by now have been guilty of death. G'd judges the Gentiles even for a sin that has been planned but not yet carried out merely due to circumstances beyond the control of the sinner. According to Bereshit Rabbah 52,13 that an angel pushed Avimelech away when he tried to sleep with Sarah, the words: "I did not allow you to sin against me" make perfect sense.

20:7 *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."*

OR HACHAIM

Now restore the wife to the man for he is a prophet! Until now Avimelech did not know who Sarah was married to. By mentioning that her husband was a prophet it became clear to Avimelech that it must be Abraham seeing he was the only prophet in that age.

Another reason that G'd mentioned that Abraham was a prophet was to reassure Avimelech that Sarah's husband would know he had not defiled her because he had prophetic powers.

20:9 *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.*

OR HACHAIM

? He said to him: "What did you do to me? What did Avimelech mean by the word: עשית? What did Abraham do? If Avimelech referred to the evil deed, i.e. the lie, he should have prefaced his remarks by referring to the sin! Perhaps the very absence of the initial מה חטאתי לך at the beginning of his complaint is the key here. It means that the words מה עשית לנו mean: "what did you do ever do for us, and how did we repay you with ingratitude that you saw fit to treat us with such suspicions!" Avimelech hinted that there is no greater evil one can do to someone than to repay kindness with evil. Abraham's conduct had almost resulted in Avimelech's death! The entire verse is to be viewed as a rebuke.

20:10 *What, then," Abimelech demanded of Abraham, "was your purpose in doing this thing?"*

OR HACHAIM

Avimelech said. Seeing that the previous verse had been a rebuke only, he now switched to a question. This is why the sentence had to begin once more with the words: "Avimelech said," though Abraham had not yet responded to the accusation. Avimelech now conceded that he did not consider Abraham capable of wanting to harm him intentionally.

20:11 *"I thought," said Abraham, "surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.*

OR HACHAIM

...אין יראת אלוקים במקום הזה. "For I said (to myself) that there is no fear of the Lord in this place. This is the answer to the question: "what did you see?" Abraham prefaced his answer with the word רק, "only." He wanted to forestall Avimelech saying to him that if he, Abraham, considered the men as lacking in basic fear of the Lord, why did he worry more about their murdering him and then taking his wife? He should have worried more about the latter! Abraham said: רק, i.e. "I reasoned that they would try and minimise their culpability. As long as I would be alive every man sleeping with my wife would commit a capital offence every time, and would accordingly face many punishments. If they killed me first, they would only be guilty of murder once, whereas they would not become culpable for sleeping with my widow. If a number of them would conspire to kill me, each one causing a single injury not in itself fatal, they would claim that they were not even guilty of murder." Abraham said that this was why he decided to describe Sarah as his sister.

20:12 *And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's; and she became my wife.*

RAMBAN

AND YET SHE IS MY SISTER, THE DAUGHTER OF MY FATHER. I know not the sense of this apology. Even if it were true that she was his sister and his wife, nevertheless when they wanted to take her as a wife and he told them, She is my sister, in order to lead them astray, he already committed a sin towards them by bringing upon them a great sin, and it no longer mattered at all whether the thing was true or false! Perhaps it was because Abimelech said, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? meaning "What sin or wickedness have you seen in me that caused you to do this out of fear? I have never attempted to take women away from their husbands." Then Abraham answered: "I did not know you, but I thought, perhaps the fear of G-d is not in this place, for in most places in the world there is no fear of G-d. Therefore, from the time I left my country and aimlessly wandered among the nations not knowing to which place we would come, I made this condition with her that she say thus in all places. For the matter is true, and I thought that by doing this, human life would be saved. I did not begin this practice upon entering your country for I did not see that you had committed any sin." And yet she is my sister, the daughter of my father. This expression represents a different argument. Abraham said: "According to my custom, I said so for it is true, and I further thought that in case they will want her they will ask me if she is also my wife. Since your servants took her and they did not ask me any questions, I said, 'The fear of G-d is also not in this place' and I remained quiet." It is possible that he established this condition with her when they came to Egypt even though he said that he did it when G-d caused me to wander from my father's house. It may be that he again warned her there in Egypt at the time of the event, as I have explained. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra's opinion is that all these words were to put off Abimelech.

OR HACHAIM

Moreover, she is in fact my sister. Here Abraham accuses Avimelech by exonerating himself also from the accusation of having lied. He implied that he never said that Sarah was not his wife! He had not deliberately misled G'd-fearing people. He had said that Sarah was his sister which did not preclude her from also being his wife. It was up to the Philistines to ascertain that she was not his wife if they were really G'd-fearing people. Perhaps Avimelech gave Abraham generous gifts because he accepted Abraham's rebuke. He may have wanted to demonstrate to one and all that Abraham had not lied. Righteous people are wont to worry that one should not even think they had done something improper.

20:13 *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.'"*

OR HACHAIM

Ever since G'd caused me to wander, etc. Now Abraham explained the background to his behaviour from the start. It had been based on the premise that there was lack of fear of the Lord in the place. He explained that his conduct was not directed specifically against the people of Geror. He had made it a general rule in his wanderings to suspect people of lack of fear of the Lord. The Philistines had not done anything to cause him to exempt them from such a doubt.

20:16 *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."*

RAMBAN

BEHOLD, I HAVE GIVEN THY BROTHER A THOUSAND PIECES OF SILVER. The sheep, the cattle and the servants which he gave him were worth a thousand pieces of silver. He thus said to Sarah: "Behold, I have given much money to your brother. Now the money will serve you as a cause for the covering of the eyes of all those who look at your beauty, closing their eyes, and those of their leaders, the seers, to prevent them looking at you and at all that belongs to you, even your manservants and maidservants. Thus your being taken forcibly to my house was for your benefit as they will fear you and cover their eyes to avoid looking at you, saying: 'The king had to redeem himself for having stretched forth his hand to the prophet's wife.'" The verse thus tells that Abimelech mollified Abraham with money, and Sarah with words, so that he should not be punished on account of either of them. The verse states in conclusion, venochachath, as Sarah did not accept his apology, for with all this, she yet continued arguing with him, saying that she would not forgive him. The verse thus speaks in her praise. Abraham, however, was appeased, and he prayed for the king. The word venochachath is similar in usage to these verses: And with Israel 'yithvakach' (He has an argument); But my ways 'ochiach' (will I argue) before Him; There the upright 'nochach' (might reason) with Him. It is possible that the expression, a thousand pieces of silver to thy brother, means thousands of pieces of silver, much wealth, according to the bounty of the king. Similarly, The smallest shall become a thousand, [means that the smallest will become] a great people. Similarly: Restore, I pray you, to them even this day, their fields, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundred pieces of silver, and the corn, the wine, and oil, that ye exact of them — [here too the hundred pieces of silver refer to] many hundreds, a great deal of money.

20:17 *Abraham then prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his slave girls, so that they bore children;*

RAMBAN

'VAYEILEIDU' (AND THEY BORE CHILDREN). If this is understood literally as referring to his wife, and his maidservants and stating that the Eternal had restrained their wombs, it is astonishing! For it appears that on the first night that Sarah was taken to Abimelech's house, and he had not even approached her, G-d immediately came to him in the dream, and in the morning he rose early and called his servants and also Abraham. When then did they experience this restraining of the womb? Perhaps it so happened that they were in their due time, experiencing the pangs of childbirth, unable to be relieved by giving birth. Perhaps, also, Abraham delayed his prayer for many days. But according to this interpretation, the nature of Abimelech's healing as well as his sickness have not been explained in Scripture. Now Rashi comments: "Vayeileidu — and they were relieved, their channels were opened, and they brought forth their wastes. This was the leidah (bringing forth) as it referred to them. All the wombs means every opening of the body." But this is not correct. Even if we were to say concerning the word vayeileidu that it means "bringing forth" — as we do indeed find the word leidah used in many contexts, such as: Yea, he conceiveth mischief 'veyolad' (and bringeth forth) falsehood; Before the decree 'ledeth' (bring forth); for thou knowest not what a day 'yolad' (may bring forth), meaning what the days will bring forth and originate — but the word rechem (womb) never refers to any other openings. This is not contradicted by the verse, Or, who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth, and issued out of the womb, for this is merely a figure of speech, similar to "the belly of the earth." Now Onkelos' opinion is not like that of the Rabbi for even if he translated, "and they were relieved," yet the word rechem (womb) he renders literally as "the opening for giving birth to a child." However, [the reason why Onkelos translated it, "and they were relieved," and not "and they gave birth," is that] he wanted to include Abimelech also in the word vayeileidu. In Bereshith Rabbah it is said: "For the Eternal had fast closed up ('atzor atzar'), i.e., closed up the mouth, closed up the neck, closed up the eye, closed up the ear, closed up above, and closed up below." Now the Rabbis derived this exposition from the double usage of the expression, atzor atzar, but they did not explain the expression, every womb, as meaning every opening of the body. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that from the day Sarah was taken to Abimelech's house, Abimelech was stricken in his limbs and was unable to fulfill his needs. This is [what the verse alludes to when it says], Therefore I did not suffer thee to touch her, as "touching" or "approaching" women are euphemisms for sexual intercourse, as in the verse, Draw not near a woman; And I came unto the prophetess. And He restrained the wombs of his wife and his maidservants who were pregnant so they could not give birth. "Restraining a womb" means that the woman could not conceive, even as it says, And the Eternal had closed up her womb. But "restraining the womb" denotes inability to give birth, similar in usage to the verse, He hath hedged me about, that I cannot go forth. Sarah stayed in Abimelech's house many days, and Abimelech did not repent his way as he did not understand his transgression until G-d came to him in a dream and informed him of it. Now Scripture does not explain Abimelech's sickness explicitly but mentions it only by hint in an ethical manner and out of respect for Sarah. After Abraham's prayer, Abimelech and his wife and his maidservants were healed, and the women gave birth.

20:18 *for the LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, the wife of Abraham.*

OR HACHAIM

For G'd had blocked all body orifices. This was so that people should not be able to say that Sarah had become pregnant by Avimelech. Avimelech was impotent during that period. The Torah also wanted to demonstrate that Abraham's prayer was effective to make the formerly barren fertile again. We also learn from this that if someone prays for someone else to be healed in an area that he himself needs healing, his own needs will be attended to by G'd first. This is why the next verse tells us about Sarah having become pregnant. While it is true that G'd had already promised this previously, if a certain sequence in scripture is not applicable to the subject under immediate discussion, it may be applied to another subject as will be discussed shortly.

21:1 *The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken.*

RAMBAN

AND THE ETERNAL 'PAKAD' (VISITED) SARAH AS HE HAD SAID. That is, by granting her pregnancy. And the Eternal did unto Sarah as He had spoken by granting her the birth of a son..Thus the words of Rashi. But the word pekidah is only an expression of remembrance and attention to the one who is remembered, such as: G-d will surely remember ('pakod yiphkod') you; I have surely remembered you; And Samson remembered his wife by [bringing her] a kid. Here, too, the sense of the verse is that the Eternal remembered Sarah, and He did to her as He had spoken. This expression is also found in connection with all barren women who later give birth. Thus, in the case of Rachel: And G-d remembered Rachel; and in the case of Hannah: And G-d remembered her. Similarly, the Rabb is said, "Biblical verses which mention pikdonoth are equivalent to verses which mention Divine remembrances."

OR HACHAIM

G'd remembered Sarah as He had said. The Torah tells us that this would have occurred even if Abraham had not prayed on behalf of Avimelech as we stated already. We should not think that G'd needed a prayer to prompt Him to keep His promise.

There was, however, a connection between Abraham's prayer on behalf of Avimelech and G'd "remembering" His promise to give Sarah a son. G'd provided Abraham with an opportunity to perform a מצוה which in turn would trigger His removing Sarah's sterility. This is the deeper meaning of the additional words כאשר אמר. Whenever G'd wants to do someone a favour, He provides him with an opportunity to perform a good deed in response to which G'd can translate His intention into practice. The reason that G'd did not make Pharaoh and his household sterile at the time Sarah was kidnapped by Pharaoh was so that Abraham could pray for them because there had not yet been a promise to Sarah whose fulfilment could have been triggered by Abraham's prayer.

...כאשר דבר, and G'd did for Sarah as He had foretold. The reason that the Torah repeats "He did" is explained in Tanchuma on our verse. When the angel had announced the impending birth by saying "כעת חיה," he had made an incision on the wall to mark the exact time of day the baby would be born, i.e. when the sun would hit that line. The Torah here confirms that the birth took place exactly as predicted.

The verse also reports something we have explained on 18,10 and again on 17,19, namely that the son Sarah bore originated in the female (negative) side of the emanations. This in turn was the reason Isaac needed to submit to the binding on the altar, something that resulted in Sarah's death. The word דבר always refers to speech containing some harsh element. The Torah therefore uses it when it wants us to note that the birth of Isaac was not something that was perfect. He had to undergo a process of refinement as a result of which he could become holy. When the Torah says ויעש ה' לשרה כאשר דבר, this really means that "G'd did to Sarah as He had foretold." Isaac was born in response to Sarah's prayer, not in response to Abraham's.

21:2 *Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken.*

OR HACHAIM

Sarah became pregnant and bore a son for Abraham. The Torah needed to mention the pregnancy because we had learned that Sarah did not have a womb. This shows that G'd performed an additional miracle for her (Bereshit Rabbah 53,5). The reason the Torah underlines לאברהם is to make it clear that only this son is to be viewed as an extension of Abraham, not Ishmael, as we read later in 21,12. Even though the Torah described Hagar as bearing a son "for Abraham" (16,15), the fact is that at that time Abraham was still called Abram. Once his name was changed, Abraham was no longer to be referred to by his original name. This means inter alia that Ishmael was not a son of Abraham. Perhaps the statement in Berachot 13 that someone who calls Abraham Abram is guilty of violating a positive commandment is precisely for that reason. Our sages do not want Ishmael characterised as a son of Abraham. Such considerations did not apply to Jacob whose name was changed to Israel as he could comfortably identify with all his sons. I have written some more about this subject on 35,10.

In his old age. The Torah adds this word and does not content itself with the more appropriate לזקנתו, because, as I wrote earlier, there was an element of the divine soul missing in Isaac at the time he was born. Isaac had only been equipped with a soul which originated in the female emanations. The repetition of the words denoting birth in verses 2 and 3, are an allusion to the eventual birth of another soul during another stage of Abraham's old age. [לזקוניו, literally: "in his old ages." Ed.] In order for someone in this world to receive something, such as an additional dimension to his soul, it is essential that the one from whom the something new is imparted has prepared himself suitably prior to imparting it. This is a concept that kabbalists are familiar with. If Isaac had possessed only the "female" soul at the time of the עקדה, the fact that he himself was ready to receive an additional soul would not have sufficed. The Torah wrote here לזקוניו...ותלד, to indicate she gave birth "twice." When Abraham offered his son on the altar this was his preparation for the "second" birth of Isaac.

A simpler explanation of the plural לזקוניו, would see in that word the old age of both Isaac's father and mother respectively. This would reflect Sarah's having spoken about both אחרי בלותי... ואדני זקן (18,12).

21:3 *Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac.*

OR HACHAIM

His son who had been born to him. Inasmuch as Abraham had another son, Ishmael, the Torah records here that Abraham stressed that this was the son who was fit to bear his name and who would fulfil the aspirations he had for him. No such comment is recorded at the time Ishmael was born. The Torah's addition אשר ילדה לו שרה, whom Sarah bore for him, is an allusion to the fact that both had constantly prayed. Abraham had asked that all his descendants should be issue of his righteous wife Sarah, whereas Sarah had also prayed to be the mother of all of Abraham's children. The word שרה refers to her prayer, whereas the words אשר ילדה לו, refer to Abraham's prayer.

Another reason for this nuance is that the name יצחק, i.e. joy, reflects the fact that an old woman had given a son to an old man. Sarah spelled this out in greater detail in verse 6.

חמישי FIFTH ALIYAH

21:7 *And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham That Sarah would suckle children! Yet I have borne a son in his old age."*

RAMBAN

'MI' (WHO) WOULD HAVE SAID UNTO ABRAHAM. The word mi is used as an exclamation of praise and distinction. The sense of the verse is thus: "See Whom it is and to what extent He keeps His promise. He promises and performs!" Thus the language of Rashi. But we do not find the word mi used in this way in expressions of distinction and honor. Instead, we find it used only in a derogatory sense: 'Mi' (Who is) Abimelech, and 'mi' (who is) Shechem? 'Mi' (Who is) the son of Jesse? The correct interpretation appears to me to be that Sarah said, "G-d hath made laughter for me; and every one that heareth will laugh on account of me, filling his mouth with song and laughter for the wonder that has been done to me, for who among the hearers would have previously said to Abraham that Sarah will suckle children? There is not a person in the world who would have told him this, even merely to console him, for the possibility would never have occurred to anyone." Onkelos' rendition is close to this interpretation: "How faithful is He who spoke to Abraham! He has fulfilled His word that Sarah will suckle children." That is to say, "Everyone that heareth will laugh on account of me" for there is no person who would have maintained his credulity even in the eyes of Abraham if he were to have told him this wonder.

21:9 *Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing.*

RAMBAN

'METZACHEIK' (MAKING SPORT). This refers to worshipping idols, murder and sexual immorality. He [Ishmael] quarrelled with Isaac about inheritance, saying, "I am the first-born and will take a double portion." They then went into the field, and

Ishmael took his bow and shot arrows at Isaac, just as you say, As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows and death, so is the man who deceiveth his neighbor, and saith, Am I not in sport? It is from Sarah's complaint to Abraham — for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir, etc. — that you learn [that they were quarrelling about the inheritance]. All this is Rashi's language. Here too, the Rabbi writes all the different opinions, [mentioned in the following]: "We have been taught: Rabbi Shimon the son of Eleazar said, 'There are four interpretations of Rabbi Akiba which I interpret differently, and my interpretation seems more acceptable than his. Rabbi Akiba interpreted: "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne unto Abraham, making sport. Making sport is but a designation for idolatry, etc." But I say Heaven forbid that such be in the house of the righteous one! Is it possible that he, of whom it was written, For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household, etc., will have in his household idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder? Making sport mentioned here is but a designation for the inheritance. When Isaac was born and everyone rejoiced, Ishmael said to them, "Fools, I am the first-born, and I take a double portion." From the complaint of our mother Sarah to Abraham you learn [that making sport refers to the inheritance]. And my interpretation seems more acceptable than that of Rabbi Akiba.'" The expression of the Rabbi, "that Ishmael quarrelled with Isaac about the inheritance," also does not appear correct for if so, this must have happened much later when Isaac was grown up, and Ishmael would then have been too big for his mother to carry him on her shoulder. Our Rabbis have also said that Ishmael was seventeen years old [at the time he left his father's house]. If so, this happened at the time when Isaac was weaned, [and Isaac was thus too young for Ishmael to quarrel with him about the inheritance]. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said in line with the literal interpretation of Scripture that metzachek means "playing," as is normal for every boy, and she was jealous of him because he was bigger than her son. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that this event took place on the day that Isaac was weaned, and Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac or the great feast. It is for this reason that the verse says, And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian — rather than Ishmael — making sport. Similarly, she said, Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for she said: "The slave who mocks his master is deserving of death or stripes, but I want only that you cast him out from before me, and that he should in no way inherit your belongings together with my son, who is the son of the mistress." She also told Abraham to cast out his mother, as the boy was unable to leave her for he would die if he were to leave his mother.

21:11 *The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his.*

RAMBAN

AND THE THING WAS VERY GRIEVOUS IN ABRAHAM's SIGHT ON ACCOUNT OF HIS SON. That is, for he had taken to degenerate ways. The plain meaning, however, is that he was grieved because she had told him to send him away. Thus the language of Rashi. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that Scripture is speaking in honor of Abraham, saying that the reason why the matter was very displeasing to him was not due to a craving for his concubine and his desire for her. Therefore, if she had told him to cast out only the maidservant, he would have done her will. But it was on account of his son that he was very much incensed and did not want to listen to her. But the Holy One, blessed be He, told him that he should not resent it at all, neither for the son nor for the maidservant, and that he should listen to Sarah's bidding for it is through Isaac alone that his name will be carried on, while Ishmael will not be referred to as his offspring. Now because Abraham feared lest an accident happen to Ishmael upon his sending him away, He told him that He will make a nation of him and He will bless him since he is indeed his son.

OR HACHAIM

On account of his son. Abraham was afraid that the expulsion would result in Ishmael pursuing unwholesome activities because he felt rejected. He had to be concerned about this since Ishmael was his son after all.

Another meaning of this expression is that Abraham resented Sarah's describing Ishmael as merely "the son of this slave-woman." G'd now interfered by telling him that Sarah was entirely justified. When G'd pointedly referred to Ishmael as הנער, the lad, and not as "your son," He made it plain that only Isaac would be considered an extension of Abraham. G'd added: "also the son of this slave-woman," when He referred to Ishmael as having a major role in history. When the Torah describes Abraham as complying with Sarah's i.e. G'd's request, he no longer refers to Ishmael as "his son," but only as "the child."

21:14 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND THE CHILD, AND HE SENT HER AWAY. This is to be understood in connection with the above: And he gave to Hagar [the bread and bottle of water]... and the child, for he gave her the child also to go with her wherever she will go.

OR HACHAIM

On her shoulder together with the child. Abraham put Ishmael also on Hagar's shoulder because the latter refused to leave his father's house. As a result Abraham tied him up as one ties up a child, put him on Hagar's shoulder and expelled her.

21:15 *When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes,*

RAMBAN

AND SHE CAST THE CHILD. Thirst overtook him and he was unable to walk, and so his mother laid him under the tree, cast away and abandoned. It may be that the word vatashleich (and she cast) is similar in sense to the verses: And He cast them into another land; Cast me not away from Thy presence, meaning "sending away." Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said: "And she cast for she had taken him onto her lap when he was weakened by thirst, [and seeing that he was expiring from thirst, she cast him from her]." Our Rabbis have said that he was sick at the time he sent him away, and therefore he put the child on her shoulder. This is the sense of the word vatashleich (and she cast) him: [until that point she had carried him]. All this occurred to Abraham because he had been commanded to do whatever Sarah said, and she commanded that he send him away immediately, and it was at her command that he did not give them silver and gold, servants, and camels to bear them.

21:17 *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.*

RAMBAN

WHERE HE IS. He shall be judged according to his present deeds, and not according to those actions which he may do in the future. This was because the ministering angels laid charges, etc. Thus the words of Rashi quoting from the teachings of our Rabbis. The correct interpretation, in line with the simple meaning of Scripture, appears to me to be that the verse is stating that G-d heard the voice of the lad in the place in which he was. He informed her that she will not need to go from there to a fountain or well for in that very place he will quench his thirst immediately. He thus said to her, "Arise, lift up the lad after you will have given him to drink, for I will make him a great nation. Similarly, the word sham (there) in verses, Where he sunk, there he fell down dead; And where the slain are, there is she, alludes to the place.

21:20 *God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman.*

RAMBAN

ROVEH KASHOTH (AN ARCHER). Since kashoth is an adjective, they have said that roveh is one who shoots arrows, the word being derived from the expressions: His archers compass me round about; The archers have dealt bitterly with him, — and kashoth is one who makes arrows. A more correct interpretation is that roveh is a shooter, and it can refer to one who shoots arrows or throws stones or other objects, even as it is said, Behold this heap... which I have thrown up between me and thee. Therefore, the verse describes him further by saying that he was a shooter with the bow. In a similar sense is the verse, And the shooters of arrows by the bow overtook him.

שישי SIXTH ALIYAH

21:23 *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."*

RAMBAN

NOW THEREFORE SWEAR UNTO ME HERE BY G-D 'IM' (IF) YOU WILL BE FALSE TO ME. The word im always expresses doubt — do not think of it in any other way — and it appears in most places in connection with an oath: If you will be false to me; And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli 'im' (if) the iniquity of Eli's house shall be expiated; Once I have sworn by My holiness 'im' (if) I will be false unto David; 'im' (if) they should enter into My rest; And he was wroth, and swore, saying, 'im' (if) one of these men will see. The purport of this is that since oaths are given with imprecation, Abimelech is stating, "Swear to me, saying, G-d do so to me, and more also if you will be false to me." Likewise it is said, Let there now be an oath between us. And in the matter of a Divine oath: I have sworn by My holiness if I will be false to David; if the iniquity of Eli's house shall be expiated, meaning "If that will be so, then My word is not true," and in similar cases, since it does not want to expressly state the condition. Scripture modifies and shortens these expressions. A similar case of a shortened condition is the verse, And Jabez called on the G-d of Israel, saying: Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, etc., and that Thou wouldest work deliverance from evil that it may not pain me. And G-d granted him that which he requested. Here the entire condition is missing. A similar example is the verse, If they will see the land, referring back to the first verse, As I live, and all shall be filled with the glory of the Eternal, and Scripture shortens the Divine oath. The expression, false to me, is because Abimelech was a king, and Abraham dwelt in his land. [Thus, if Abraham were to do him evil, it would be an act of disloyalty towards him in his royal capacity], or it would be a betrayal of Abimelech's love for him, as he [Abimelech] was his trustworthy friend, honoring him and doing his will. For you see that Abraham found no fault with him except the well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away, and the king said to him, According to the kindness that I have done unto thee.

21:24 *And Abraham said, "I swear it."*

OR HACHAIM

Abraham said: "I will swear. Abraham implied that he could counter Avimelech's arguments but had decided instead to swear as Avimelech requested.

In consideration of Abraham's intention to rebuke Avimelech (verse 25), he thought that if he did this immediately Avimelech would interpret Abraham's attitude as a denial of the favours the king claimed to have done for him. He decided therefore to state first of all that he was willing to swear the oath in question.

Another way of looking at the verse is that Abraham accepted the oath only for himself, i.e. אנכי; he was not prepared to commit his son or grandson as had been requested by Avimelech.

21:26 *But Abimelech said, "I do not know who did this; you did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today."*

OR HACHAIM

...וגם אנכי, Avimelech said: "Also I have not heard, etc. The words: "also I," need clarification; so do the words: "who has done it." All Avimelech needed to say was "I did not know."

Apparently, Avimelech had been aware that someone had robbed Abraham of his wells but he did not know the identity of the robbers. Abraham therefore told Avimelech that he should have made it his business to find out who the culprits were. To this argument Avimelech replied that Abraham himself was also at fault because he had not informed him previously. He, Avimelech, had waited for Abraham's complaint; he would have taken action as soon as he would have received an official complaint from Abraham. Seeing Abraham had not informed him, he had remained unaware. This is the meaning of: "also I did not hear until this day." He meant that he made no effort to inform himself of the situation and was apprised of it only today when Abraham spoke up.

21:32 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND THEY RETURNED TO THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES. The sense of the verse is that they returned to their city which was in the land of the Philistines for they lived in the land of the Philistines. However, they abode in Gerar, which was the royal capital, while Abraham dwelled in Beer-sheba, which is in the land of the Philistines, in the valley of Gerar.

21:33 *[Abraham] planted a tamarisk at Beer-sheba, and invoked there the name of the* LORD, *the Everlasting God.*

RAMBAN

AND HE CALLED THERE IN THE NAME OF THE ETERNAL, 'E-IL OLAM' (THE EVERLASTING G-D). Scripture explains that Abraham called by the name Eternal He Who in His might directs the time. It may be that heaven and earth are here being called olam (world) [so that the sense of the verse is, "he called by the name Eternal the G-d of the world"], as is a customary expression in the words of our Rabbis. Thus Scripture informs us by this that Abraham called out and informed people of the secret of the leadership of the entire world, namely, that it is in the name of the Eternal, the Mighty One in strength, Supreme in power over all. Now the Rabbi said in the Moreh Nebuchim that this alludes to the principle of the pre-existence of G-d since Abraham let it be known that G-d existed before the creation of time. Onkelos, however, said of the word vayikra (and he called), that it refers to prayer.

שביעי SEVENTH ALIYAH

22:1 *Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am."*

RAMBAN

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.

OR HACHAIM

It was after these events . The events referred to are Abraham's various adventures, the tortuous route to becoming Isaac's father at an advanced age. In the meantime Isaac had grown up since we find Abraham described as "living in the land of the Philistines for many years," and Isaac was born during the first year of Abraham's stay there. The test assumed much greater impact in view of the repeated promises G'd had made to Abraham concerning Isaac and his future. To be told at this stage to offer Isaac as a sacrifice and not to hesitate or challenge G'd's command or even ask for an explanation, was a tremendous act of obedience. Isaac too deserves great credit for submitting. Another reason that the Torah wrote "after these events" is, that only now could G'd refer to Isaac as Abraham's only son. As long as Ishmael had not yet been expelled by Abraham the description "your only son" would not have been appropriate.

G'd tested Abraham. The Torah adds the conjunctive letter ו before the word אלוקים to remind us that this was not Abraham's only test, only the most recent and most difficult one.

He said to him: "Abraham. This introductory call by G'd was to prepare Abraham that G'd would ask him to do something difficult. Abraham understood this; this is why he said "I am ready (for whatever You are going to tell me to do)."

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."*

RAMBAN

TAKE NOW THY SON, THINE ONLY SON. Since Isaac was the son of the mistress and he alone was to be the one to carry his name, He called him Abraham's only son. The description was for the purpose of magnifying the command, thus saying: "Take now thy only son, the beloved one, Isaac, and bring him up before Me as a burnt-offering."

MORIAH. Rashi comments: "This is Jerusalem, and we find it in the book of Chronicles: To build the house of the Eternal at Jerusalem on mount Moriah. Our Rabbis have explained that it is called Moriah (instruction) because from the Temple built there on that mountain, instruction came forth to Israel. Onkelos translated it as "the land of Worship." This he derived on the basis of reference to the burning of incense, which contained mor (myrrh) and other spices, [as part of the Divine Service]." Now if so, [i.e., if this be the explanation of the name Moriah], the meaning of the verse will then be, "Go into the land which will be called Moriah." Or it may be that it was always called so on account of the future. In Bereshith Rabbah, the Sages have said thus: "The Rabbis say, Go into the land of Moriah means into the land where incense will be offered on the altar of G-d, even as it is said, I will get me to the mountain 'hamor' (of myrrh)." But the opinion of Onkelos, who said "the land of worship," does not appear to be based on the myrrh in the incense, as Rashi said, for the word "service" does not refer to one of the species used in one of the Divine Services. Besides, why did not Onkelos say, "to the land of the incense of spices?" Instead, Onkelos' intent is to say, "in the land in which they will worhip G-d." Onkelos thus matched that which the Sages interpreted in Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, where they said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, showed Abraham the altar with a finger. He said to him, 'This is the altar on which the first man sacrificed. This is the altar on which Cain and Abel sacrificed. This is the altar on which Noah and his sons sacrificed.' For it is said, And Abraham built 'hamizbei'ach' (the altar) there, mizbei'ach (an altar) is not written here, rather, hamizbei'ach (the altar). This is the altar on which the predecessors have sacrificed." Thus far [is the interpretation of Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer]. And the name Moriah the Rabbis derived from the word mora (fear), for there the people feared G-d and worshipped Him. The correct interpretation, in line with the plain meaning of Scripture, is that the name Moriah is like the expression, To the mountain of myrrh, and to the

hill of frankincense, for on that mountain [Moriah] are found myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon, even as the Rabbis have said: "Cinnamon grew in the Land of Israel, and goats and deers ate of it." Or it may be that it was so called in praise of the Land of Israel. Now here Scripture calls the name of the land, the land of Moriah, and there [in the book of Chronicles, mentioned above], it appears that only the Temple mount was called mount Moriah. Perhaps, the city was called by the name of that mountain which it contains, [and the name "land of Moriah" means] the land which contains the Moriah, but it was the mountain alone that was called Moriah. Now Abraham knew the land but did not know the mountain. Hence G-d told him to go to the land of Moriah, and He will there show him one of the mountains which is called by that name. He commanded him to offer up his son in that place for that is the mountain which G-d hath desired for His abode, and He wanted the merit of the Akeidah (the Binding of Isaac) to be in the sacrifices forever, as Abraham said, The Eternal seeth. Moreover, for His righteousness' sake, He increased the scope of the trial and wanted Abraham to do it after walking three days. Had Abraham been commanded to do so suddenly at his place, his deed would have been performed in haste and confusion, but since it was done after walking for days it was thus performed with reflection of mind and counsel. And so did the Rabbis say in Bereshith Rabbah: "Rabbi Akiba said, 'G-d surely tried [Abraham with a clear-cut situation] so that people should not say that He confounded him and confused him and he did not know what to do.'"

OR HACHAIM

Please take your son, etc. G'd meant for Abraham to proceed immediately and not to ask for time before carrying out the command, such as happened with the daughter of Yiftach (Judges 11,37) who had asked to be given two months before becoming her father's sacrifice to G'd.

Tanchuma 22 on our verse describes Abraham as spending the whole night asking Sarah to permit him to take Isaac with him to teach him Torah.

Our verse also contains a hint that seeing that Isaac had not previously been tested, Abraham should broach the matter to him in a manner that would secure Isaac's willingness. Abraham should convince Isaac that by agreeing to serve as an offering to G'd he would achieve great moral stature.

your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac. Here the Torah alludes to three levels of love that G'd demands of each Jew, i.e. to love G'd with all his heart, all his soul, and all his financial resources (Deut. 6,5). The word בנך alludes to the heart; nothing is closer to a man's heart than the love for his children. Concerning love with one's soul, the Torah mentions יחידך; when a person has no children he is alone and considered as dead. Love with one's soul is therefore love with the only thing one has left to love with. The words אשר אהבת refer to one's possessions; G'd meant that Abraham loved Isaac more than all his other possessions. G'd's test consisted of Abraham demonstrating that though he loved Isaac from all these perspectives he was yet willing to give him up to G'd in the form of a total offering.

22:3 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND HE CLEAVED THE WOOD FOR THE BURNT-OFFERING. This illustrates Abraham's zeal in performing a commandment for he thought that perhaps there would be no wood in that place, and so he carried it for three days. It may be that Abraham disqualified for use as an offering any wood in which a worm is found, as is the law of the Torah, and so he took from his house sound wood for the burnt-offering. Hence it says, And he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering.

OR HACHAIM

Abraham arose early in the morning. Abraham acted in line with what we know from Leviticus 7,38, that sacrifices may be brought only by day. Our sages also said (Zevachim 98) that one must not bring an offering at night. Abraham therefore set out at an hour that was suitable for bringing an offering. He did not know how far he had to travel and he wanted to have enough time left to offer the sacrifice once he would be at the right place. In view of G'd having addressed Abraham by day, perhaps he should not have waited until the following day; it is possible that he received the instructions in the late afternoon or that Isaac was not at home at the time. By reporting that Abraham rose early, the Torah explains that the day's delay was not due to any negligence on Abraham's part.

22:4 *On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.*

RAMBAN

AND HE SAW THE PLACE AFAR OFF. He saw a cloud attached to the mountain, and through this was fulfilled the Divine assurance, which I will tell thee of. It is possible, in line with the simple meaning of Scripture, that the verse, And he saw the place afar off, means that he saw the land of Moriah for he knew that entire land [although he did not know the specific mountain].

22:9 *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.*

RAMBAN

AND THEY CAME TO THE PLACE WHICH G-D TOLD HIM OF — now, "This is mount Moriah," for He told him, "Behold, this is the mountain of which I told you."

22:12 *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."*

RAMBAN

FOR NOW I KNOW THAT THOU ART A G-D FEARING MAN. At the beginning Abraham's fear of G-d was latent; it had not become actualized through such a great deed. But now it was known in actuality, and his merit was perfect, and his reward would be complete from the Eternal, the G-d of Israel. The doctrine of this chapter which teaches that G-d is the One who tries

Abraham and commands him about the binding of Isaac, and it is the angel of G-d who restrains and promises him, will be explained in the verse, The angel who hath redeemed me.

22:16 *and said, "By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,*

RAMBAN

BECAUSE THOU HAST DONE THIS THING. In the beginning He promised him that he would increase his descendants as the stars of heaven and the dust of the earth, but now He gave him the additional assurance that because thou hast done this great deed, He swore by His Great Name [that He would increase his descendants as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore], and that his seed will possess the gate of its enemies. Thus Abraham was assured that no sin whatever would cause the destruction of his descendants, nor would they fall into the hand of their enemies and not rise again. Thus this constitutes a perfect Divine assurance of the redemption which is destined to come to us.

מפטיר MAFTIR

22:20 *Some time later, Abraham was told, "Milcah too has borne children to your brother Nahor:*

RAMBAN

BEHOLD, MILCAH, SHE ALSO HATH BORN CHILDREN. Since Milcah was the daughter of his brother Haran, this was a tiding to Abraham that his older brother Nahor had been visited with many children from the daughter of his dead brother Haran. Now from the text of Scripture it would appear that Abraham had no knowledge of any of them except on that day. If they were visited with children in their younger days, it would be impossible for them not to have been heard until this time for the distance between Mesopotamia and the land of Canaan is not great. Now when Abraham left Haran he was seventy-five years old, and Nahor was also elderly and his wife too was not young. Indeed, we must say, G-d performed a miracle for them in that they were visited with children in their old age. This is the sense of the verse, Milcah, she also. In the words of our Rabbis, it is said that Milcah was visited with children as was her sister Sarah.

OR HACHAIM

After these events Abraham was told, etc.. The reason that the Torah recorded this whole paragraph as well as the words "after the events," something totally unrelated to what the Torah spoke about previously, is to tell us that now Rebeccah, Isaac's soul-mate, had been born. We have already explained why Rebeccah was born only at that point in time. Isaac, whose soul had originated in the female emanations, had not acquired a soul from the male emanations until after the עקדה, the binding on the altar. ובתואל ילד את רבקה, Bethuel fathered Rebeccah. This is the principal line of the whole paragraph. Why did the Torah have to bother to list all the other descendants of Nachor including those from his concubines? The Torah reminds us that ever since the spiritual poison of the original serpent permeated Adam, purity could no longer exist in isolation. The birth of even the most perfect human being is invariably accompanied by the birth of impure people who lie in wait for the pure. By telling us of the other descendants of Nachor, the Torah indirectly extols the virtue of Rebeccah, mother of all that is holy, who, despite the environment she grew up in, shone forth with her many virtues.

22:23 *Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother.*

RAMBAN

AND BETHUEL BEGOT REBEKAH. The verse does not mention Laban, even though he was older than Rebekah, for its intent is only to mention the eight children which Milcah bore to Nahor. However, Rebekah is mentioned since the entire chapter is written to make known her genealogy. Kemuel the father of Aram. Aram is mentioned only in order to make known the identity of Kemuel as Aram was a more important man than his father. Perhaps, also, there was another Kemuel in their generation. Hence [Scripture identifies Kemuel by saying that] he was the father of Aram.

22:24 *And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.*

RAMBAN

AND HIS CONCUBINE, WHOSE NAME WAS REUMAH. Scripture tells the entire tiding which they related to Abraham concerning his brother's children. It is possible that this was written in order to make known the entire genealogy of Nahor, to establish that all of them were worthy to marry the children of Abraham, and it was with reference to all of them that Abraham said to Eliezer: But thou shalt go unto my father's house and to my family. Chayei Sarah