

וירא

Vayera

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

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הפטרה 35

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

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



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מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 21:26

Real love and real peace both include honest rebuke

Bereshit Rabbah 54:3

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

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

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

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

חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

APTA · OHEV YISRAEL, VAYERA

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

Ohev Yisrael

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

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

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

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

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

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

חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

RUZHIN · VAYERA, BEIT YISRAEL (RUZHIN)

Why does God set a constant inner struggle within us?

Beit Yisrael

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

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

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

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

Sometimes a person performs a mitzvah as "a commandment of men learned by rote," but his thought is directed to Hashem, a good thought. Then Hashem combines the thought with the deed. That is, through the good thought, Hashem combines and

also purifies the deed. When a person turns from evil and does good, he can come to a revelation of Godliness. This is "And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre": when a person is in the bechinat (aspect of) "You have been rebellious (mamrim) against Hashem," that is, when the yetzer is overpowering him, he places Hashem in opposition to it. Then he can overpower it and serve Hashem. In truth it is better when a person refines the evil and takes from it the good for his avodah of Him, yitbarach. This is "And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre."

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

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

חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

SHINOVA · MAREH YECHEZKEL ON TORAH, VAYERA

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

Mareh Yechezkel

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

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

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

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

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

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

חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

SOCHATCHOV · SHEM MISHMUEL, VAYERA

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

Shem MiShmuel

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

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

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

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

End of his words.

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

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

Therefore one may say that this is the reason He delayed showing it to him for three days: so that he would be moved away entirely from his former nature and attribute, and there would be a complete separation between his former essence and his later

essence. The first day is joined to the past, the third to the future, and the middle one entirely divides and separates, just like the three months there.

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חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

CHERNOBYL · ME'OR EINAYIM, VAYERA

Can even a wicked person draw close to God?

Me'or Einayim

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

KOZHNITZ · VAYERA, AVODAT YISRAEL

Why did Avraham have guests washed through a messenger?

Avodat Yisrael

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nevertheless, he was punished in that the Holy One, blessed be He, repaid his children with the water only through a messenger. For given the greatness of the compassion of the Holy One, blessed be He, for His creatures, it was fitting that Avraham

extend himself to them even in the matter of the washing, and wash them himself, trusting in his Creator to guard him from all evil.

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

