

HEAD FOR THE HILLS!

By Ozer Bergman

“Flee to the hills so you won’t be swept away” (Genesis 19:17). The Midrash explains: Lot was saved in the merit of Avraham, who is called a “mountain,” as in “Skipping over the hills” (Song of Songs 2:8), and “Listen, O mountains” (Micah 6:2) (*Bereishis Rabbah* 50:11).

You know the expression “Art imitates life”? It’s the other way around with Torah. “Life imitates Torah,” because God looked into the Torah and used it as a blueprint to create the world (see *Genesis Rabbah* 1:1; take a look, as well, at the story “The Master of Prayer” [*Rabbi Nachman’s Stories*, p. 302] that the upheaval of Sodom [Genesis 19:24-25] is written in the hand). Usually our understanding of the Torah-life connection is even less than our understanding of a Jackson Pollock painting. But in a Hurricane Sandy week, it’s pretty clear.

Lot was a disciple of Avraham Avinu (our Patriarch). One day he made a critical mistake. Thinking he could navigate this world without a rebbe, a spiritual guide and teacher, he left Avraham Avinu and moved to Sodom. This did not work out too well for him or his family. Nonetheless, despite his steep spiritual decline, the angel came to save him (*ibid.*, 19:15, 17–22). When the angel told Lot to head for the hills, he wasn’t only telling him to evacuate or in whose merit he was being saved. He was telling him: Save yourself! Go back to your teacher, Avraham! Thank God, we didn’t abandon our teachers and move to Sodom. But we do look towards Sodom (*ibid.*, 13:10), and we don’t always heed our rebbe’s advice. We need to save ourselves!

Life is stormy, within and without. From infancy through childhood and into adolescence, the storm rages within, our blood churning with desire, craving sweets, wanting this and that and what the other kids have. The inner storm subsides somewhat, but rarely is the

damage totally undone. Into adulthood the storm of possessing—things, territory, people, status—continues. The biggest storm is the one that takes place in our minds and hearts. Who owns *them*?

Rebbe Nachman teaches that when we give charity, we create a calm, tranquil atmosphere. This, he tells us, allows the message of a genuine rebbe to be heard even “far away,” even by someone not inclined to living a holy life. Hearing does not mean receiving aural input. It even means more than understanding the inner intellectual depth of a teaching heard. It means getting the message, changing one’s attitude so that one now holds with the rebbe (*Reb Gedaliah Kenig*).

This is one reason why Avraham Avinu was so thoroughly involved in giving charity, in the kindest ways possible. He wanted every single person in the world to hear his message: You have so much untapped good within you—but it’s trapped. The Divine is in you—but it’s trapped. In order to hear messages like these—and to hold with them—you must be both a recipient *and* a giver of kind charity.

We all know the saying “A million dollars, a million friends” (see Proverbs 19:4). But money earned from a grab-storm attracts friends who grab. Money earned from the calm passion to give, on the other hand, attracts friends who give. To calm the inner storm of wanting and the outer storm of grabbing, we need to know in our bones and in our guts that we always have enough to share and enough of what we need (because all we need is already there for the asking).

Head for the hills! Aim to be like Avraham Avinu. For him, to *not* give, hurt. We can reach that. We can hold with that. It’s in our DNA.

*A gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Toan v’Nitan* 5:8

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SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman taught:

The key to everything is the way you start. All beginnings are difficult, because you are trying to turn things from one direction to the opposite direction. But once a start has been made, you begin to get used to the direction you are going in and things are no longer so hard. ...

Therefore you must marshal all your strength and steel yourself to make a vigorous beginning. Start again every time with new fire and passion for God. Start as if you had never begun at all before. The strength of your new beginning will bring power and vigor into all your devotions (*Advice, Awe and Devotion* #12).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

18:1 God appeared to him at the Trees of Mamre

The True Seeker Will Find The Correct Path

Mamre advised Abraham to perform the circumcision (Rashi).

The Trees of Mamre allude to the two Trees in the Garden of Eden: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. *MaMRe* (ממרה) is similar to *teMuRah* (תרומה, exchange), for there is a path that leads to the Tree of Life and there is a Chambers of Exchanges in which good and evil are mixed up, distorting a person’s path. Abraham represents the person who seeks God; by virtue of his efforts, he finds the correct path and God appears to him. Moreover, because of his great desire for Godliness, the “Mamre” or Chambers of Exchanges itself gives Abraham the advice to guard his covenant, to strive for holiness.

The Torah describes the extent of Abraham’s desire for Godliness: “He was sitting at the opening to the tent in the heat of the day”—when a person seeks

spirituality, he must learn to wait for an opening and never give up. He must wait patiently, despite the “heat”—despite his burning desires. If he holds out, he merits that God will appear to him. “He saw three wayfarers”—for the ascent to holiness demands several efforts; one cannot enter on the first try. “He ran”—because Abraham performed the *mitzvot* with joy and zeal (LH VI, p. 40a-80).

19:11 They struck the men who were at the door of the house with blindness

Look For The Opening To Holiness

Petach (door) literally means “opening.” A person must always search for the opening to holiness in order to enter through it. However, not everyone is worthy of entering. Those who are unworthy are misled by many problems and confusions that lead them away from the opening. Thus, “They struck the men who were at the door...with blindness”—they were prevented from finding the opening to holiness (LH VII, p. 176a).

20:7 Return the man's wife

Tzaddikim Guide Us To Proper Prayer

The Patriarchs revealed God to the entire world through the power of their prayer. In this regard, each of them referred to the place of prayer by a different title. Abraham called it a “mountain,” Isaac called it a “field,” and Jacob called it a “house” (*Pesachim* 88a).

Abraham was the first to reveal God. Since very few people were attuned to God at that time, this manifestation was called a “mountain” (cf. Genesis 22:2), which is not generally accessible.

Isaac further revealed God's Presence in the world. When he established the Afternoon Prayer, he referred to the place of prayer as a “field” (cf. *ibid.*, 24:63). A field is more accessible than a mountain. However, not everyone has a use for it.

Then, when Jacob prayed, he called the place of prayer a “house” (cf. *ibid.*, 28:17), which is something that everyone needs.

Our mission is to elevate prayer from the conceptual levels of “mountain” and “field” to that of “house,” so that everyone

will recognize the power of prayer. In addition, while we must always pray to God, we must also acknowledge that only the *tzaddikim* know the true path of prayer. Thus, we must travel to a *tzaddik* and ask him to pray on our behalf and show us how to pray properly.

All of this is alluded to in the narrative of Abimelekh taking Abraham's wife Sarah and then being forced to return her.

The name *AVIMeLeKh* (אבימלך, Abimelekh) is comprised of two words, *AVI* (אבי, my desire) and *MeLeKh* (מלך, king), connoting a person who wishes to rule. Some people unjustifiably believe themselves to be *tzaddikim* and tell people to come to them for their prayers. They are compared to Abimelekh, who forcibly took Sarah (who represents both authority and prayer) for himself.

Such a false leader must rectify himself by returning prayer to the *tzaddik*, who can elevate prayers to their proper level. Therefore God told Abimelekh, “Return the man's wife, because he is a prophet.” *HaSheiV* (השב, return) is an acronym for *Har* (הר, mountain), *Sadeh* (שדה, field) and *Bayit* (בית, house). Because Abimelekh damaged prayer, he now had to bring his prayers to the *tzaddik*, Abraham. In this way, he elevated prayer (*eishet*) through three levels until it became universally known. The word *EiSheT* (אשת, wife of) is an acronym for the phrase *Adonoy Sefatay Tiftach* (אדני שפתי תפתח, God, open my lips [Psalms 51:17]), connoting prayer.

Furthermore, Abraham is described as a prophet because the word *NaVi* (נביא, prophet) is related to the phrase *NiV sefatayim* (ניב שפתיים, movement of the lips), which also connotes prayer (LM I, 10:4). We learn from this that when a person's prayers reach perfection, he can attain prophecy (*ibid.*, II, 1:8).

KITZUR L”M WEEKLY

17 — “It happened as they emptied their sacks” (Genesis 42:35) *(continued)*

11. But why is it that these particular individuals find things that contradict their

faith and return to recognize the Jewish faith, while others find nothing at all? Know that it is because of the good—that is, the parts of Jewish souls—held captive by the gentiles. For as a result of the gentiles' [anti-Jewish] decrees, taxes and so on, they withhold good from the Jewish people and prevent them from performing God's *mitzvot*. This good [which they kept from coming into existence] is thus “held captive” in their domain. In the beginning [of its captivity], this good remembers that it came from a very holy and exalted place. Subsequently, however, the gentiles overpower this good and suppress it within their domain, until it is seized by and bound up with them, and forgets its [true] exalted level.

But when “Jewish speech” goes forth and is written in the books of the gentiles, this good then discovers it there in the form of ideas contradicting the gentiles' faith. Then this good remembers its [true] level and how it came from an extremely holy and exalted place—in other words, [it remembers] that it consists of parts of Jewish souls for whose sake all the worlds were created, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, conferred with the souls of the Jewish people to create the world, and the souls of the Jewish people are above all the worlds. Now, however, this good is held captive in such an exile and it could perhaps face annihilation and perdition, God forbid. This good begins to grieve and to pine and to pity itself for having fallen from so lofty a place to such depths. As a result, it returns and reverts back to holiness. And all this is effected through the charity one gives to a true Torah scholar.

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