

Shabbos: Ta'am HaChaim

Vayeira 5777

Avraham and Eradication of Evil

Introduction

This week's parashah contains a theme that appears to run throughout the entire parashah. The Torah commences this week with the incident where Avraham has just been circumcised and despite his pain, he invites three strangers to partake in a sumptuous meal. Avraham himself waits on his guests and he is then informed that he and his wife Sarah will be having a child. The guests, who are angels in disguise, then depart to destroy the city of Sodom and its surroundings.

Praying for the wicked people of Sodom

HaShem informs Avraham of the tragic state of affairs in Sodom, and Avraham prays to HaShem to spare the cities in the merit of the righteous. HaShem informs Avraham that there are no righteous people in all the cities and Avraham desists from praying further. The angels then enter Sodom where they are greeted by Lot who invites them into his house. The residents of Sodom are not pleased with this act of hospitality and they attempt to harm the visitors. HaShem causes the citizens of Sodom to become blind and the angels then proceed to escort Lot and his remaining family out of the city. HaShem then destroys Sodom and its environs and Lot

escapes with his two daughters. Lot and his daughters then engage in an illicit relationship, and the union bears the two forerunners of the Ammonite and Moabite nations. The Torah then records how Avraham settles in the Philistine city of Gerar and the king of Gerar, Avimelech, abducts Sarah. HaShem then punishes Avimelech and his household by restraining their orifices.

Yishmael is banished and Avraham and Yitzchak are tested by Hashem. The Torah then relates how Sarah gave birth to Yitzchak and subsequent to Yitzchak's birth, Sarah demands that Avraham banish Yishmael and his mother because of Yishmael's evil ways. Following this incident we learn how Avraham makes a treaty with Avimelech, and then the Torah relates the spellbinding incident where HaShem instructs Avraham to offer his cherished son Yitzchak as a sacrifice. HaShem then sends an angel to repeal this commandment and Avraham slaughters a ram in Yitzchak's stead.

The negation of evil

The theme that we see running through this parashah is what is referred to as bittul hara, negation of evil. Circumcision is essentially a negation of the Evil Inclination and the materialism represented within. Sodom was the epitome of evil, and Avraham apparently desired, in the words of the Gemara (Brachos 10a), yitamu chataim vilo

chotim, let the sins cease but not the sinners. Lot acted in a self-defeating manner, bringing shame upon himself and his future generations. Similarly, Avimelech encountered Avraham and Sarah, righteous people, and HaShem punished him harshly. Yishmael was banished from the home of the righteous, and Avraham and Yitzchak were tested in an unprecedented manner. This test, in a sense, was the expiation of any doubt in their minds that they could have possibly had regarding HaShem's Oneness and His dominion over the entire world.

The Shabbos connection

In the prayer of kegavna that is recited by Nusach Sefard on Friday night, we recite the words kad ayil Shabbsa ihi isyachadas viisparashas misitra achara vichol dinin misabrin minah, when the Shabbos arrives, she unified herself in Oneness and divests herself of the Other Side, [any trace of evil] all harsh judgments are removed from her. Thus, the purpose of creation is that the Jewish People divest itself of all evil and harsh judgments. It is incumbent upon us to recognize that every moment of our lives is a test to choose between good and evil, and when we are victorious, we merit the holiness and exaltedness of Shabbos. HaShem should allow us to be victorious in this world and to merit a portion in the World to Come, when it will be a day that will be completely a Shabbos and a rest day for eternal life.

Shabbos in the Zemiros

Kel Mistater

This mystical Zemer was composed by Avraham Maimin, whose name with the addition of chazak, is formed by the acrostic. Avraham was a student of Rabbi Moshe Kordevero, a member of the Kabbalistic school of the Arizal, and he lived from 5282-5330 (1522-1570 C.E.)

מֵאֵין תְּמַצָּא וְהִיא נִעְלָמָה. רִאשִׁית הַקָּמָה יִרְאֶת יְ-הֵ-וֶה, from the Invisible One it derives, but it is hidden – the source of wisdom is awe of HaShem. Whenever one wishes to describe HaShem's Wisdom, which is His Holy Torah, one is left without words. The reason for this is because Torah is beyond human understanding. Indeed, the Gemara (Megillah 6b) states יִגַּעְתִּי וּמְצַאתִי תֵאֵמַן, if one says, "I have toiled and I have found," i.e. I have achieved success in my studies, believe him. The Sfas Emes writes that the Gemara likens Torah study to one who finds a lost object. One can toil in his search for the lost object, but when he finds it, it is like a gift handed to him. Similarly, one can toil in this world in Torah study, but success in one's studies is a gift from HaShem.

Shabbos Stories

Rav Aharon Kotler's Father the Fur Merchant

HaGaon Rav Aharon Kotler told over a story about his father's mesirus nefesh for Torah. His father was a fur merchant

in Lita. At a certain period, his business dwindled, and it reached a point where his family was lacking food to sustain themselves.

Every day after Shacharis, his father would learn for two hours, and was mapkid on this learning period his entire life. One day, a wealthy merchant knocked on the door of the Kotler family, and informed them that he would like to buy a sizable amount of furs. However, it was the set learning time of Rav Kotler. His wife knocked on the door of his room, once, twice, and three times, and urged her husband to utilize this opportunity for his business.

Rav Kotler answered from behind the door, "Go tell him that if he's willing to wait until I finish my learning, good! If not – he should go in peace. A person's mezonos is set from Rosh HaShanah until Rosh HaShanah. If it was decreed that I will sell the merchandise, I'll find a buyer!"

Rav Aharon concluded his story, "My father's wondrous mesiras nefesh for Torah instilled in us the emunah peshutah, â~When you learn Torah, you never lose out!' All of my mesiras nefesh for Torah – I acquired from him!" (Tuvcha Yabiyu) (www.Revach.net)

True humility

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky writes: Rabbi Dovid Koppleman tells the story of Rabbi Abish, the Rav of Frankfurt who was known for his extraordinary humility. In addition, he would often

raise funds for the needy families of his city. Once he heard that a wealthy man was on business in town and went to the man's hotel suite to ask him for a donation. The tycoon was arrogant and assumed that the Rav was a poor shnorrer, and after a few moments drove him out of his room. A few minutes later the man went to leave his suite and looked for his silver cane. Noticing it was gone, he immediately suspected that Reb Abish took it during his brief visit.

Quickly, the man bolted toward the lobby of the hotel where he accosted Reb Abish. "Thief," the man shouted while pushing the Rav, "give me back my cane!" Reb Abish calmly pleaded. "I did not steal your cane. Please do not accuse me! Please believe me. I did not steal your cane!"

The man was adamant in his arrogance and began to beat the Rav while onlookers recoiled in horror. Reb Abish, despite the pain, remained steadfast in his humble demeanor. "Please believe me. I did not steal your cane!" Finally, the man realized he was getting nowhere and left Reb Abish in disgust.

That Saturday was Shabbos Shuva. The entire community, including the wealthy visitor, packed Frankfurt's main synagogue for the traditional Shabbos Shuva Speech. Horror gripped the visitor as a familiar looking figure rose to the podium and mesmerized the vast audience with an eloquent oration. It was the very shnorrer he had accosted in the hotel! As soon as the speech ended, the man pushed his way toward the podium

and in a tearful voice tried to attract the Rabbi's attention. He was about to plead forgiveness for his terrible behavior when Reb Abish noticed the man.

In all sincerity Reb Abish began to softly plead with him. "I beg of you! Please do not hit me. I truly did not steal your cane." (www.Torah.org)

Shabbos in Halacha

Wringing and Laundering

3. כיבוס – Laundering

The melacha of כיבוס forbids all methods of *laundering*, including those that can be done without the assistance of water, such as גיעור מעפר, dusting [a garment], and הסרת הכתם, removing a stain [by brushing]. However, we will focus only on cleaning with *water*, for this method of *laundering* is most relevant to cleaning the table after a meal.



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