**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Vayeira – Vol. 13, Issue 4**

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**והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא וירץ לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה ... יקח נא מעט מים (18:2-4)**

 Avrohom excelled in the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim (hosting guests). Three days after he circumcised himself at the age of 99, Hashem did not want Avrohom to burden himself with taking care of guests, so He brought a powerful heat wave that deterred all travelers on that day. Still, the weak Avrohom’s greatest concern was that the unusually hot weather would deny him the merit of welcoming guests, so he decided to sit at the entrance of his tent in the hopes that he might spy a stray traveler. When Hashem saw Avrohom suffering over his lack of guests, He sent three angels in the guise of people. Rejoicing at this improbable turn of events, the elderly and frail Avrohom ran to personally invite them to his home and proceeded to serve them a lavish and abundant feast.

 Rav Yissocher Frand recounts a powerful story regarding the importance of the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim. One morning in Toronto, a local man noticed a visiting meshulach (charity collector) and invited him to his home for breakfast. He asked the fundraiser about his itinerary, to which he responded that he intended to spend most of the day circulating around Toronto, after which he would move on to his next destination that evening.

The local man begged the meshulach to change his plans and to instead sleep in his house that night. The collector resisted, explaining that his time was extremely limited and he could not afford to spend another night in Toronto. However, the host persisted and told the collector that if he stayed with him that evening, he would give him a larger check than he would ever receive in the next city, an offer to which the fundraiser acquiesced. The following morning, the host gave his guest an extremely generous check as he had promised, jotted down his contact information, and sent him on his way.

 A year later, the host in Toronto called the meshulach and informed him that he would be making a bris for his newborn son the following week, and that he would be sending an airplane ticket so that the collector could fly in for the occasion and serve as sandek (person who holds the baby during the ceremony). The meshulach was speechless. He barely knew the man and couldn’t fathom why he wanted to fly him in and honor him as sandek. Nevertheless, the host was determined, and the incredulous fundraiser ultimately agreed to come in for the occasion.

 After the bris was over, the new father called over the collector to explain his actions. He said that he had been married for many years, but had not been blessed with children. He shared his plight with Rav Avrohom Yaakov Pam, who advised him that the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim is a segulah (action that can change one’s fortunes) for having children. A short while later, the man’s wife was going to the mikvah, so he desperately wanted to fulfill the mitzvah of hosting guests that night. When he came to the synagogue and saw the meshulach, he saw his opportunity and prevailed upon him to sleep in his house that evening. As Rav Pam had told him, the host’s wife became pregnant that month, and that is why he insisted that the collector attend the bris that he helped make possible and be honored as sandek. While this is certainly a fascinating story, from where did Rav Pam get this segulah?

 In Tefillas Geshem (the prayer for rain that is said on Shemini Atzeres), we invoke the water-related virtues of our righteous ancestors and beseech Hashem to grant us water in their merits. The stanza pertaining to Yitzchok begins, זכור הנולד בבשורת יקח נא מעט מים – Remember the one who was born with the tidings of, “Let some water be brought.” Avrohom and Sorah were married for many years without children, yet after they hosted the angels with tremendous self-sacrifice, their guests immediately informed them that at this time the following year, they would have a son. Rav Frand suggests that this may be the source for Rav Pam’s advice that just as the heretofore barren Avrohom and Sorah were blessed with the news of Yitzchok’s birth through their hachnasas orchim, so too would the merit of the hospitality of the couple in Toronto enable them to have a long-awaited child of their own.

**ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר אחרי בלתי היתה לי עדנה ואדני זקן (18:12)**

 When Sorah heard the angels herald that she would bear a son at her advanced age, she responded by laughing. My good friend Rabbi Dan Lifshitz points out that the theme of laughter recurs too many times in Parshas Vayeira to be coincidental. After the angels’ blessing moved Sorah to laugh, Lot’s sons-in-law laughed when he warned them about Sodom’s imminent destruction (19:14). Sorah’s decision to send Yishmael and Hagar away was cemented when she observed him (21:9) מצחק – mocking. When Yitzchok was born, his father gave him a name (21:3) that means, “He will laugh,” and his mother remarked (21:6), “Hashem has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.”

 Rav Shamshon Rafael Hirsch explains that it is appropriate that Parshas Vayeira, which discusses the foundations of the Jewish nation, is replete with the concept of laughter, for the very existence of the Jewish people is absurd from a historical perspective. The notion that a relatively small nation should be exiled from its homeland and dispersed around the earth not once but twice, the second time for more than 1900 years, and manage to maintain its religious identity and traditions defies logic.

Yet as preposterous as it seemed to Sorah’s neighbors for a 90-year-old woman and her 100-year-old husband to give birth to a child and live long enough to raise him and educate him in their monotheistic religion and ethical worldview, this was precisely Hashem’s plan for His chosen nation. Our continued existence and prosperity in the face of all odds is the greatest proof of the nonsensical nature of Jewish history, and ultimately, we will have the last laugh, for Dovid writes in Tehillim (126:2) that when the time of our redemption comes and Hashem returns us to Eretz Yisroel, אז ימלא שחוק פינו – then our mouth will be filled with laughter, may it be speedily in our days.

**וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך בקרניו**

 **וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעלה תחת בנו (22:13)**

 At the end of Parshas Vayeira, Hashem commands Avrohom to bring up his beloved son Yitzchok as an offering to Him. However, just as Avrohom was about to kill him, an angel called out and ordered him not to harm Yitzchok. At that point, Avrohom lifted up his eyes and saw a ram trapped in the bushes by its horns, which he proceeded to sacrifice in lieu of Yitzchok.

The Gemora (Rosh Hashana 16a) teaches that one of the reasons we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana is to invoke the dedication and self-sacrifice that Avrohom and Yitzchok displayed in this episode as a merit on the Day of Judgment. Since Avrohom offered a ram on the altar he built for Yitzchok, we are accustomed to use a shofar made from the horn of a ram. However, Rav Shimon Schwab points out that if our goal is to remember the animal that Avrohom sacrificed in place of Yitzchok, it would seemingly make greater sense to use a more vital and significant part of the animal than its horn. Why was the its horn specifically chosen for this purpose?

 Rav Schwab explains that the animal that Avrohom offered in Yitzchok’s stead was not an ordinary ram. The Mishnah (Avos 5:8) teaches that this ram was created at the end of the week of Creation. This means that for more than 2000 years, it managed to successfully hide and escape from potential predators. Yet when Avrohom needed an animal to offer as a substitute sacrifice, this hardened and experienced ram suddenly became trapped in the bushes and was unable run away.

The Torah stresses that the means through which this ram finally met its downfall were its horns, which became entangled in the undergrowth and prevented it from escaping. Symbolically, the message of the horn is that when Hashem wants a person or animal to be in a certain place, there is no way to avoid it, a lesson that the prophet Yonah learned the hard way. Therefore, we specifically use a ram’s horn to invoke this episode on Rosh Hashana to remind ourselves of this important concept at the time when the entire world is being judged for the year ahead.

 To illustrate this idea, Rav Yisroel Reisman recounts that there was once a Chassidic family flying to spend Rosh Hashana with their Rebbe in Brooklyn. Due to engine troubles, the airplane was forced to make an unscheduled landing in Texas. Examining their options, they realized that there was no way for them to reach New York in time for Yom Tov. The father called the Rebbe and told him that due to an unexpected delay, they were stuck in Texas and would not be able to spend Rosh Hashana with him. The sagacious Rebbe responded, “Stuck? A Jew is never stuck! You may not be where you wanted to be or where you expected to be, but you are in the exact location that Hashem decided you are supposed to be” – just as we learn from the ram’s horn.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. Which two women got divorced in Parshas Vayeira? (Ichud B’Chidud 5777)
2. Did Avrohom sleep the night before setting out for the Akeidah (22:3)? (Har Tzvi, Nesivos Rabboseinu, Ayeles HaShachar 20:8)
3. Pharaoh had three chief advisors – Yisro, Bilaam, and Iyov (Sotah 11a). Which two of them were brothers and are both mentioned in Parshas Vayeira? (Daas Z’keinim 22:21)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) The **Ichud B’Chidud** notes that in Parshas Chayei Sorah (25:1), Avrohom marries a woman named Keturah, who Rashi identifies as Hagar. This means that Avrohom divorced Hagar when he sent her away with Yishmael (21:14). Additionally, Rabbeinu Bechaye (20:2) writes in the name of Rabbeinu Chananel that when Avrohom traveled to Gerar, he learned from his experiences in Egypt when his beautiful wife Sorah was taken away from him to be given to Pharaoh. He was worried that the people of Gerar would similarly be interested in her, and that he would be killed if he acknowledged that Sorah was his wife. Avrohom therefore decided to divorce her prior to their arrival, and after the danger passed, he remarried her. However, because the divorce was only due to Avrohom’s fear for his well-being, it was not considered a true divorce, and this is why Hashem appeared to Avimelech in a dream and referred to Sorah as a married woman (20:3).

2) As Avrohom prepared to set out for the Akeidah, the Torah records (22:3) וישכם אברהם בבוקר. The **Brisker Rov** maintains that the word וישכם means “to wake up early” and can only be used if the person was sleeping during the night. He explains that this reveals the greatness of Avrohom, who was calm enough to sleep the night before setting out for the Akeidah, which he viewed as just another mitzvah to perform. However, **Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank** and **Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman** point out other places where the word וישכם is used even though it is clear that the person did not sleep the night before. For example, the verse records (Shmuel 1 15:11) that Shmuel davened to Hashem the entire night, and the next verse states וישכם שמואל לקראת שאול בבקר – Shmuel rose up early in the morning to great Shaul – even though he clearly did not sleep the previous evening. Additionally, the Mishnah in Sanhedrin (40a) teaches that in certain cases, the judges on the Beis Din should remain awake discussing a case, and in the morning, משכימין ובאין לבית דין – they should get up early and come to the Beis Din, even though they were awake the entire night. As such, they argue that there is no proof whether or not Avrohom slept the night before setting out for the Akeidah.

3) At the end of Parshas Vayeira, the Torah records (22:20-22) that Avrohom’s brother Nachor and his wife Milkah gave birth to several children. The oldest son was named עוץ, who is identified by the **Daas Z’keinim** as Iyov based on the first verse in the book of Iyov: איש היה בארץ עוץ איוב שמו – There was a man in the land of עוץ whose name was Iyov. The third child of Nachor and Milkah was named קמואל, who the Daas Z’keinim writes was Bilaam, for his name hints that he was קם על אומתו של ק-ל – he rose up against Hashem’s nation, in which case Iyov and Bilaam were brothers.

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