

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 20 Mar Cheshvan 5787. Corresponding to October 31, 2026

TORAH DIALOGUE
(p. 63 Hz) (p. 86 S) (p. 88 Hi) (p. 78 AS)
VAYERA וַיֵּרָא
By Rabbi Edward Davis

1. 18:10. *"And Sarah was listening."* This visitation of the angels was made especially for Sarah. Although the promise had already been given to Avraham that Sarah would bear a son to him (17:19), Hashem's plan required that this promise be activated and set into motion only when the angels would deliver the message to her. It was then that her youthful abilities were restored. Had Avraham not hastened to receive the wayfarers, and had Sarah been unwilling to knead and bake the bread for them, the message would not have been delivered to her; and the fulfillment of Hashem's promise would have been deferred. We learn the lesson that the exercise of kindness to others is a prelude to greatness, for thereby men find favor in the sight of Hashem, *"for He desires kindness"* (Michah 7:18). Similarly, Rivkah was chosen because of her kindness (24:14), Yosef became elevated because of his kindness (40:7), and Moshe was chosen because of his kindness (Shmot 2:11)—*"He went out to his brothers"*.

18:10. *"And Sarah was listening at the door of the tent."* This is not said for itself, but is a model (Binyan Av) for all the behavior of Sarah. (a) She always kept out of sight. (b) She always stood near the doorway to listen to Avraham's discourses to wayfarers and others, in which he spoke of God's ways and of virtue and wisdom. The verse really states "Sarah was a listener," and thereby she attained greatness. (Rabbi Avigdor Miller.)

2. The acts of the righteous are always performed in a hurry. When the visitors came, Avraham hurried to attend to them and hurried his wife. When Rivkah went to give Eliezer's flocks to drink, she also acted in haste. The Midrash (BaMidbar Rabba 10) states that all the acts of righteousness are performed in hurriedness. This was to teach us that if a person is not burning to fulfill a desire of his Creator, then he will end up being lazy when performing Mitzvot. The message is to exercise a measure of zeal in our movements to perform God's will. The external movement will light a fire within us so that we will begin to feel the zeal and exuberance inside as well. (Mesillat Yesharim.) Avraham orders a large amount of food, much too much for three people. Rambam felt that the honor due to visitors is also greater when Avraham's principle men would join in the banquet. R. David Cohen writes that perhaps the extra amount was ordered because bread baked in a full oven tastes better; and Avraham wanted the best for his guests.

3. *"Because the outcry of Sodom and Amorrhah has become great"* [lit. *the outcry of Sodom and Amorrhah because it is great.*] —The outcry of its rebellion against God or the cry caused by its violence (Ibn Ezra). Or,

according to Ramban: The cry of the oppressed begging for liberation. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 109b) specifically relates this to the incident of a Reva, young girl, [some say she was Lot's daughter, Pelotis (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer)] who, in defiance of the laws of Sodom which forbade the giving of charity, once carried out bread concealed in a pitcher, to a poor man. When the matter was discovered they daubed her with honey and placed her atop a wall; bees came and consumed her. The Talmud (ibid) records many similar instances of the horrendous deeds of the Sodomites. To cite a few: They had beds upon which travelers slept. If the guest arrived who wished to rest, he was led to one of the beds. If the guest was too tall his feet would be cut off to make him fit; if, on the other hand he was too short they would stretch him out. They would kill and steal the money of wealthy men who entered their cities. If one laid out his fruits, they would each take a 'sample' until nothing was left, claiming 'I have taken only one.' Also their laws were so perverse that the *victim* of a crime would often be fined! Also, adultery, incest, and other sexual aberrations were the norm. It was these cries that ascended to God, and which caused the Rabbis to explain: The people of Sodom have no share in the World to Come.

4. *"Upon fleeing Sodom, Lot and his wife were told not to look back."* (19:17.) Kli Yakar interprets this as an injunction not to look back in regret for the wealth they left behind. Lot's wife, however, could not make peace with this loss of possessions. Had she been concerned with having money with which to help others she would have been spared. But her punishment revealed her true intention. She was converted to salt, a corrosive substance that eats away the substance of coins. So, too, Lot's wife. In her hands, money was corrosive; a tool of greed rather than goodness, for it was only Lot who provided hospitality for guests. When his wife turned around it was in selfish grief and fear that when her husband died penniless, none would provide for her. Therefore, the Torah says that she looked *behind 'him'* (v. 26) – her concern was for the time when he would be gone.

5. Avraham had deceived Avimelech by calling Sarah his sister. Avimelech now wanted to know from Avraham why he had felt the need to go to such lengths of deception to protect himself. Avraham replied that since the fear of God would not act as a natural deterrent to Avimelech's subjects, he had had to look for other deterrents. Being afraid now that Avimelech—like Pharaoh—would say "At least you could have told ME that she is your wife," Avraham could not very well tell him that that revelation might not have been deterrent enough. Therefore he mentioned that Sarah was in fact a kind of sister to him. Since it was in order at that time to marry blood relations of such category, i.e. a niece, a lie had in fact never been uttered. Since Avimelech had failed to ascertain that there was an ADDITIONAL relationship between Avraham and Sarah, he had only himself to blame for the complication that had arisen. Avraham explained that it had been his practice to describe Sarah as his sister as long as they had been wanderers, and had not yet reached their permanent place of residence. Avimelech, presenting gifts to

Avraham, behaved in an appropriate manner. Inasmuch as he had contravened the "What is yours is yours" principle by appropriating Sarah without asking Avraham whether she also happened to be his wife, he atoned now by using the "What is mine is yours" principle. (Akeidah Yitzchak.) This approach by Avimelech truly separated him from the attitude of the Sodomites.

6. *"And it came to pass after these things that God tested Avraham..."* (22:1). The Ramban comments on the nature of all the Biblical "tests." He points out that unlike human testing, the purpose of a Divine test is not that God may learn something He doesn't know, for God is omniscient. Since the Almighty is aware of the outcome of a Divine test before it is given, what then is its purpose? The Ramban explains that these tests are given only to concretely demonstrate to the individual his own potential and then to appropriately reward him. Hence each test is a step forward and a strengthening of powers which already exist but which have not yet been proven at this high level. The commandment to sacrifice Yitzchak is a classic example of this point as it is the ultimate realization of Avraham's implicit trust in God, a demonstration which climaxes in his founding of the Jewish nation. Finally, the Ramban tells us that God never gives man a test which he cannot master; each individual is challenged on his own level.

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT VAYERA 5787

I. From the Text

1. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
2. What did Lot feed his guests to eat? (19:3)
3. To where did Avraham move after Sodom was destroyed? (20:1,2)
4. How old was Avraham when Yitzchak was born? (21:5)
5. Whose idea was it to expel Yishmael from Avraham's home? (21:10)

II. From Rashi

6. Why did Hashem come to visit Avraham? (18:1)
7. What were the tasks that the three angels were sent to perform? (18:2)
8. When Avraham was negotiating with Hashem about the destruction of Sodom, he stopped after suggesting if there were 10 righteous people. Why did he stop there? (18:32)
9. Why did only 2 of the angels/men come to visit Lot? What happened to the third angel? (19:1)
10. How long did Avraham live in the land of the Philistines? (21:34)

III. From the Rabbis

11. What specific sin did the Sodomites commit to deserve their destruction? (Ramban)
12. Why did Mrs. Lot turn around and look back? (ACCORDING TO THE RAMBAN)
13. How do we reckon the view that Yitzchak was 37 years at the Akeidah?

Iv. Midrash

14. Who were the two young men who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the Akeidah?

V. Haftorah

15. In the Haftorah, the prophet Elisha helped a poor widow pay off her creditor. Who was the widow's dead husband?

VI. Relationships

- 16.
- a) Lot - Haran
- b) Avraham - Nachor
- c) Yitzchak - Yishmael
- d) Terach - Yishmael
- e) Hagar - Sarah

ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT VAYERA 5787

1. To watch for and invite guests to enter and visit.
2. Fresh Matzah
3. To the Philistine area, where Avimelech ruled.
4. 100.
5. Sarah
6. To visit and comfort the sick. Avraham was just circumcised.
7. To cure Avraham; to destroy Sodom; to tell Sarah that she she will give birth to a son.
8. Because Noach and his family were eight, and they could not save their generation.
9. One angel already performed his task, to inform Sarah of the good news; so he left.
10. For 26 years.
11. They would not help the poor and the needy.
12. She wanted to see if her married daughters were following them.
13. Sarah was 90 when she gave birth to Yitzchak. She was 127 when she died, and she died when she heard that Yitzchak was offered as a sacrifice.
14. Eliezer and Yishmael.
15. The prophet Ovadiah.
- 16.
- a) Father Haran
- b) Brothers
- c) Half Brothers
- d) Grandfather Terach
- e) Co-wives