



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

5786 Parshat Vayera

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Hello, Welcome!

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide,
independent and inclusive adult education
program**

**focusing on understanding Jewish
relevancy to our lives by studying text
most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour
each week, friendships are forged between
mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the
rich***

***legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and
guidance
for many who have, until now, lacked
access.***

Thank you for joining us!

**Please encourage friends to join you in
participating so that we may grow
together as
a community.**

תשפ"ו Vayera

The Torah tells us (Genesis 18:20) that the people of Sedom and Gomorrah were very evil.

(כ) וַיֹּאמֶר יְדֹד זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וְעִמֹרָה כִּי רַבָּה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כִבְדָה מְאֹד
(כא) אֲרָדָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה הַבְּצִעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עָשׂוּ כָּלָה וְאִם לֹא אֲדַעַה

20) So Hashem said, "Because the outcry of Sedom and Gomorrah has become great, and because their sin has been very grave, 21) I will descend and see: If they act in accordance with its outcry which has come to Me – then, destruction! And if not, I will know."

Indeed, these two cities represent the paradigm of ultimate evil, which we invoke whenever we want to exemplify pure depravity. In addition to their extreme licentiousness, their cruelty reflected itself in their "legal" system, which forbade, and severely punished, any acts of kindness. If a hungry person entered the city looking for food, no one was permitted to give him anything to eat. The rules were to let him die of hunger.

The Midrash informs us that Lot had a daughter named Plotit who was very beautiful and was married to one of the officials of Sedom. When she once saw a poor man dying of hunger in the city, she had mercy on him; when she would leave her house to draw water, she would first fill her bucket with food and give it to the poor man on the way to the well. Sedom's evil people noticed that this poor man was living a little too long and concluded that someone must be slipping him food on the sly. They staked out observers who caught Plotit in the act. She was convicted and burned alive for her sin (!) of kindness.

Another girl also had mercy on a poor starving man, and this time they smeared her body with honey and put her on the wall of the city where the bees and wasps stung her to death.

In yet a third incident, two girls met at the well, one of whom was starving. The other girl sensed her extreme distress and would fill her bucket with food and then switch buckets with her friend. Once again, when she was caught, she was burned alive.

In their great pain and agony from their being burned alive, the girls cried out to Hashem, Who heard their cries and decided to end such cruelty.

Hashem concluded that He needed to wipe out these people and everything they stood for. This would serve as an example for all mankind that cruelty to one another will not be tolerated.

In an unprecedented move, Hashem revealed to Avraham His plan to destroy Sedom. The Torah explains why (Genesis 18:18,19):

(יז) וַיִּדְוֹד אֶמֶר הַמַּכְסָּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה
(יח) וְאַבְרָהָם הָיָה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעָצוּם וְנִבְרָכוּ בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ.
(יט) כִּי יִדְעִיתִי לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָוֹךְ יִדְוֹד לַעֲשׂוֹת
צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא יְדוֹד עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלָיו

*17) And Hashem said, "Shall I conceal from Avraham what I do? 18) Now that Avraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him, 19) For I have loved him, **because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice, in order that Hashem might then bring upon Avraham that which He had spoken of him.**"*

This verse reveals to us why Hashem loved Avraham so much: ***because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem.***

During Avraham's times Hashem had many other loyal servants. Shem and Ever, both prophets, had a flourishing yeshiva of students who studied Torah. The Midrash tells us that Yaakov Avinu studied in that yeshiva for fourteen years. But what ultimately came from it or any of its students? Nothing. Why? Because the sole purpose of their study was for themselves, their own personal service to Hashem, and not to share it with anyone outside the yeshiva's walls.

But Avraham, who loved Hashem more than all of them, thought to himself, "What will be in the end? No one lives forever, and, after I die, Hashem's honor will disappear from the world." Therefore, Avraham worked with all his might to make Hashem's name known to every human being in the world. And he succeeded! The Midrash tells us that, "הַקְרִיאָה בְּרִיָּה בְּפִי כָל בְּרִיָּה" - *Avraham made Hashem's name a household word in the mouth of every person.* The Midrash also tells us that Avraham converted thousands of people to belief in Hashem, as it says, *וְאֵת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בַחֲרֵן*. He showed them the proper path of life and urged them to follow Hashem.

Avraham was Hashem's representative for truth and justice, and he modeled what was right in the world. He even criticized King Avimelech when he did not take action against the thieves in his kingdom.

Because Avraham gave every fiber of his being to teach the world about Hashem and how to follow His perfect ways, Hashem blessed him with a son, Yitzchak, and then a grandson Yaakov, and the twelve tribes, all who followed Hashem's ways meticulously. They grew into a full

nation of Hashem's servants who would bring the entire world to recognize and serve Hashem.

This is why Hashem loved Avraham more than any of the others before him. Only Avraham's love for Hashem was so great that it was not enough that only he know about Hashem and that he have a great life. Avraham determined that everyone needed to know about Hashem! And it wasn't enough for him that his generation have that knowledge; he had to see to it that the rest of humanity, until the end of time, would know about Hashem. And he succeeded through his children and grandchildren until today. How privileged we are to be counted among his Avraham's grandchildren.

Maimonides writes (The Laws of Idol Worship 1:3)

והתחיל לעמוד ולקרוא בקול גדול לכל העולם ולהודיעם שיש שם אלוה אחד לכל העולם ולו ראוי לעבוד והיה מהלך וקורא ומקבץ העם מעיר לעיר ומממלכה לממלכה עד שהגיע לארץ כנען והוא קורא שנאמר ויקרא שם בשם ה' אל עולם וכיון שהיו העם מתקבצין אליו ושואלין לו על דבריו היה מודיע לכל אחד ואחד כפי דעתו עד שיחזירוהו לדרך האמת עד שנתקבצו אליו אלפים ורבבות והם אנשי בית אברהם ושתל בלבם העיקר הגדול הזה

*Avraham began to call out in a loud voice to the entire world, and to let them know that there is only one G-d for the whole world and that we should worship only Him. He would travel around from city to city and from country to country, gather people and teach them about Hashem until he reached Canaan, all the while, calling out in Hashem's name. And as people gathered around him and asked him about his ideas, **he would explain to each one of them according to his mindset**, until he convinced him and brought him to the truth. In the end, tens of thousands gathered to him, and they are called, "The members of Avraham's household," because he planted the belief in Hashem into their hearts.*

As Avraham's grandchildren, we bear the selfsame responsibility - to be Hashem's representative for truth and justice in the world and to teach our children and others about Hashem and His perfect ways.

This is why Hashem loved Avraham so much. But why was this the reason that Hashem felt it necessary to reveal to Avraham His plan to eradicate Sedom and Gomorrah?

Before creating a covenant with Avraham by giving him the mitzvah of *brit milah*, Hashem changed Avram's name to Avraham (Genesis 17:5).

(ה) וְלֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת שְׁמִי אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמִי אַבְרָהָם כִּי אֲבִי הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְּתִיךָ
5) *Your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations:*

As the father of all nations, it would be improper for Hashem to eradicate some of Avraham's children without giving him a chance to save them. Moreover, it now became Avraham's responsibility to educate them. Perhaps through proper education they would understand the folly of their ways and change them. As we learned above from the words of Maimonides, Avraham was a master teacher. He could answer every question and was able to answer each person on his level. Knowing that Avraham wanted all of his children to go in Hashem's ways, Hashem gave him a chance to save Sedom and Gomorrah.

Avraham understood that he needed to start with a nucleus of righteous people to save the cities. After negotiating with Hashem to spare the cities in the merit of finding a minyan of righteous people, he realized that there were none at all. At that point there was nothing that Avraham could do, and Hashem destroyed the cities.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot tells us that Hashem tested Avraham with ten tests, the greatest of which we read about at the end of this week's parsha, the binding of his beloved son Isaac. Each of the tests challenged

Avraham's faith and commitment to Hashem to the max, yet Hashem explained that He loved Avraham so much because he educated his children in His ways. Why would that be the sole reason for Hashem's great love for him?

The ten tests made Avraham a greater person, and we, as his grandchildren, have inherited the great qualities that he acquired through those tests. The tests made those qualities a part of our DNA. Yet without this component of teaching his children, all would have been lost.

Because the Jewish people see having a close relationship with Hashem as their *raison d'être*, they place Torah education as their most important ideal, it being the only path to achieving perfection in one's life both in spiritual and worldly matters. In a confused and chaotic world, Torah education establishes the trustworthy foundation for the morals and values of the Jewish people. Torah education must be the focal point from which all else emanates.

From its inception, with its very formation, the Jewish nation was founded on the principle that clear Torah education is paramount.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes in his commentary to the Torah (p. 417):

I have chosen him (Avraham) not for his own sake - to make him a rich and powerful emir - but to be the founder and educator of a nation charged with a noble mission. I have chosen him not for his own good, but for the good of his Nation. I shall support and assist him in his mission as the educator of a people. This is the only reason I must reveal to him My plan and give him insight into My decisions for he is to bring about the great and unique educational miracle of instilling in his beloved son, child of his old age, the

guiding principles - spiritual and practical - of this future nation. Long after he, the patriarch, will have departed this world, his children and his house after him will still be standing strong on this firm foundation still living on the basis of these principles and making of them a living reality. Thus, he, the patriarch, will live on forever through each one of his children and through all the members of his house, and every drop of blessing that comes to the very last of his descendants will be ascribed back to the patriarch.

When Hashem wished to sing the praises of the founder of Judaism, Avraham Avinu, He could not find a more appropriate accolade to stress other than Avraham's focus on his children's education. Never was there a goal of having educational laboratories or history museums. The only goal of Jewish education is for the sake of educating the next generation in the Torah's ways.

A Jewish child cannot blossom into a wholesome Jew without the best authentic Jewish education. Only true Torah education can protect the Jewish people from the difficult challenges that face us.

Avraham Avinu's aspirations are evident in his children and grandchildren until today wherever they dwell across the globe. Indeed, the power of Jewish education did not stop with Yitzchak and Yaakov; rather, it continues to influence all of their progeny until now.

It is clear that providing an authentic Jewish education must be the first priority of every Jewish parent. Every child is a link in the chain of the future, and the more vigilant the parents are to give their child the best possible foundation, the greater contribution they are giving to the next generation. We all know that today's children are tomorrow's future.

There was once a child in a “cheder” who was a very big troublemaker. A day didn’t go by when he didn’t pull a prank that sent his teachers reeling. They were concerned about the negative influence that this boy was having on the other students and on the decorum of the school in general, and they seriously considered throwing him out. Although they were at their wits end with him, knowing that throwing him out of the cheder would mean that he would wind up in the street, they were holding off as long as possible.

One day, one of the teachers entered the shul of the school and heard weird sounds coming from the Holy Ark. He approached the ark, opened it, and in it he found a goat!

There was no question as to who the culprit was, and, sure enough, the boy admitted to having placed the goat in the Holy Ark. This was the last straw, and the decision was reached to have the boy leave the school.

After being told to leave, the boy wouldn’t budge. He was told in no uncertain terms that he needed to go home, but the boy would still not move. The principal asked him, “How are we going to settle this standoff?”

The boy responded, “Take me to the head judge of the Rabbinical Court!”

The Rabbis knew with whom they were dealing and that they would not get him to do anything until they complied with his wish, so they brought him to the head rabbi of the Rabbinical Court.

This is what the boy told the judge.

“Throwing me out of the cheder will affect not only me, but it will also have repercussions for all of my children and grandchildren. Did you

consult with my children and grandchildren before you decided to throw me out?”

The rabbis stood dumbfounded. They had never before heard such a claim. As you can well understand the Head Rabbi decided that they could not throw him out.

A great Talmudic scholar and educator told that story at his son's engagement party. He then said, “I am the grandson of that mischievous boy! You see what came out of him?”

There is a story of a philosophy professor whose final exam consisted of one word at the top of the paper, “Why?”

Virtually all the students understood that the professor was asking the most vexing and difficult questions of philosophy, “Why is there a world? Why do we exist?” To answer this question, they wrote long philosophical dissertations presenting their answers with supporting proofs.

One student wrote one word on his paper and handed it in. He was the only student to receive an “A” on his paper. What word did he write? “not” “Why not?” This was the lesson of the professor at the end of his philosophy course. If there is something you wish to do, it's okay to do it unless you can figure out a reason not to do it.

Many Jewish people adopt this approach about Judaism. Because they are uneducated in the mitzvot and the Torah's laws, they perceive them to be rote, simplistic actions with no meaningful reason or meaning behind them. So, it logically follows, **why not** take a pass?

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Because Hashem, whose intelligence is infinite, conceived the Torah's laws and customs, so, too, the Torah's laws are infinitely deep and are laden with purpose and meaning. A glance from the distance does not reveal the joy and

contentment of the person doing the mitzvah, but that is exactly what he is experiencing. The mitzvot bring joy and inner peace to a person even though he doesn't understand its underlying reason or meaning. (Does a person have to understand the inner workings of an internal combustion engine before he can enjoy the use of his car?) This is because Hashem has empowered those actions with the ability to affect our souls in a positive and holy way. With each mitzvah that we perform, we become better and better. It is like building muscle. You must do many "reps" before you begin to see results. Similarly, it is only after performing the mitzvot consistently for a while that you are able to sense your growth.

This is why Jewish education on every level and for every Jew is so vital to our continued existence as a people. Without meaningful Jewish education, people tend to drift away from Judaism.

This is our mission at Partners Detroit: to provide quality Jewish education to every member of our Detroit Jewish community to enable them to appreciate the goldmine of wisdom that awaits them in the Torah. Our mission is to provide the information. We don't tell you what to do with it. But, "An educated consumer is our best customer!" (Borrowed from Syms) When you understand the wisdom and meaning behind the mitzvah, it makes so much sense, and you are in a much better position to do it if you should wish.

If you are an active participant in Partners Detroit, or an alumnus, you have no doubt experienced what I have described. That is what keeps you coming back, week after week. Yet, as the children of Avraham Avinu, we must follow his example and "spread the wealth" to our family and friends. Please invite them to accompany you to a learning session at Partners so that they, too, can experience the joy of understanding our

Holy Torah. Hopefully, they will enjoy it and sign up to learn on a weekly basis.

May we each take to heart the lesson of Avraham Avinu — that true love of Hashem is not a private treasure, but a light meant to be shared. Let us continue to illuminate our homes, our community, and our city with that light of Torah and kindness, so that the cries of cruelty and confusion that once reached Heaven are replaced by the voices of learning, compassion, and unity. In this merit, may we and our children be blessed to walk proudly in Avraham's path, bringing nachat to our ancestors and joy to Hashem.