



# Rambam

# המתמיד

ב"ה

פרשת וירא

October 22-23 2010 יד-טו מר-השון תשע"א

Issue II

Volume XV

### זמני שבת

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זמנים for zip code 11559

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## Lot's "Kindness"

Imagine the following scenarios:

-At graduation, the principal is acknowledging those students who excelled in the area of chesed, and mistakenly fails to mention your name!

-Your name is omitted from a charity fund-raising event, despite your substantial donation!

-You travel for hours to fulfill the mitzvah of nichum availim or bikur cholim, and after a mere few minutes' visit, the mourner or choleh excuses themselves so they can rest.

-You were present at a well-attended levayah or a simcha and the mourner or host does not recall your participation, as they were pre-occupied and overwhelmed.

Whether or not you have personally experienced any of the above circumstances, they nevertheless feature a common dilemma that confronts many of us on a daily basis: How to appropriately engage in acts of chesed, with the proper mindset.

Lot's behavior in this week's Parsha offers an interesting perspective regarding this issue. Residing in the sinful and immoral city of Sodom, he risks his life by inviting guests into his home, demonstrating kindness he clearly learned from "Uncle Avraham." However, when pressured and threatened by a mob of townspeople to hand his guests over, he insists on offering his daughters instead, stating, "Do to them as you please but to these men do nothing inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof." (19-8). How can an individual risk his life engaging in kindness, yet at the same time can be so unkind to his own daughters in order to continue that kindness?

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**Rabbi Avrum  
Haar**  
*Rebbe/Mashgiach*

## A Time for Prayer: A Place to Pray

The source for the Jewish practice of praying three times a day is derived from the conduct of the Avos. Specifically, in this week's Parsha, Avraham enacts the tefila of Shacharis, as the Pasuk says "And Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood (Amad -as in Amidah or prayer)," while praying for Sedom on the previous day. (Maseches Berachos 26b).

In an earlier explanation of the above Pasuk, Rabi Huna says "Anyone who establishes a place for his prayer will have the G-d of Avraham to help him." (Maseches Berachos 6b) We can derive this from the Pasuk as Avraham is praying, "where he had stood" on the previous day. Rashi comments that the G-d of Avraham will help a person who prays in an established location in the same way He helped Avraham based on Avraham's prayer that day.

The Torah does not explicitly state what Avraham was praying for on that morning as he looked out over Sedom. Sforno explains that Avraham was in fact entreating Hashem to save the people of Sedom even as Hashem destroyed the cities.

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**Elisha  
Pearl**  
*Senior*

## **Lot's "Kindness"** *continued*

True, individuals are often mistakenly selective regarding perfection of their character traits, allowing one to be sympathetic and compassionate on the one hand, as well as lewd and promiscuous on the other! However, Lot seems to be inconsistent within the attribute of chesed itself!

We can resolve this dilemma by examining the appropriate attitude required for performing genuine chesed. Chesed is NOT a mere performance executed so as to discharge an obligation, nor is it a mechanical, robotic exercise for which reward is guaranteed. Chesed requires wisdom and reasoning, understanding the plight of the individual and ignoring your own needs, as well as implementing the mission appropriately, with the objective of satisfying the recipients needs. Lot's Hachnasas Orchim, though it was impressive, was a mechanical, demonstration of behavior he had inherited, rather than a manifestation of genuine kindness fueled by compassion and concern for others. It was an end in and of itself, to the degree that his obsession allowed him to mercilessly offer his own daughters to a raging mob, failing to realize his insensitivity and brutality.

The aforementioned fictional scenarios might be irritating to an individual who feels that their kind gesture was unfulfilled and therefore without purpose, only due to their misguided impression of the nature of chesed. If one is able to focus on the true value and objective of their actions, they will recognize that recognition and accolades are not a component of Chesed. This realization may thereby prevent unwarranted grief and disappointment, and in addition, will serve to prevent inconsistent behavioral traits such as those exhibited by Lot, enhancing our ability to genuinely practice gemilus chasadim, as well as emulating the ways of Hashem, the paragon of Chesed.

## **A Time for Prayer: A Place to Pray** *continued*

Perhaps, Avraham reasoned, Hashem did not accept his previous prayer, as Avraham was appealing to Hashem's trait of justice. Hashem might reconsider if Avraham appealed to His trait of mercy. Nevertheless, we see Sedom and its sister cities were completely obliterated.

It is somewhat disturbing that the Gemara uses an unanswered prayer as the paradigm of G-d's assistance and reward to someone who prays in a fixed location. Some commentators suggest that Avraham was praying for Lot's safety and was immediately answered. This interpretation is arguable, and indeed not accepted by the majority of early commentators, because Hashem had already declared that Lot would be spared and many believe Lot was saved because of his righteous actions while he stayed with Avraham.

The Arizal gives an inspiring mystical answer as to why the Gemara uses this seemingly unanswered prayer as a model of G-d's assistance. The Gemara (Maseches Sanhedrin, Perek Cheilek) states, that neither the generation killed by the Mabul nor the generation dispersed because of its participation in the Tower of Babel have a share in the world to come. By extension, neither did those who were killed in the upheaval of Sedom. Hashem however, is all-merciful, and he is prone to give sinners many opportunities to correct their sins. The generation of the flood failed in their mission on earth, but Hashem gave them a second chance reincarnating a spark of their souls as the generation of the dispersal. They too failed, so Hashem offered them a third chance, as the residents of Sedom and its tributaries. When Avraham looked out upon Sedom, explains the Abarbanel, he looked with a prophetic eye, in a deep state of meditation. Arizal continues to say that Avraham saw as he looked out, that these wretched souls would have one more chance to spark another generation: the Jewish people who were destined to leave Egypt. When Avraham appealed to Hashem's attribute of mercy, he was not praying for the physical bodies of the Sodomites; they had already been destined for destruction, Avraham could not change that. Avraham was in fact praying for their souls, so that the Jews in Egypt would be able to overcome their spiritual challenges, and not fall permanently into the abyss.

The Gemara may be trying to teach us that if one prays in a set location each day, their prayer will have an added potency and though it may not be answered immediately and apparently, it will eventually be answered with a powerful impact on the petitioner or his progeny.

The Dubno Magid likens Hashem's response to prayer to a tailor's response to an order for a custom made suit. At times, the suit can be made immediately and with ease, sometimes, it may take a long while until the suit fits the wearer, and occasionally the suit will only fit the orderer's children.

May Hashem answer all of our prayers speedily and for the revealed good, and may we merit to see the era of Moshiach, in which G-dliness will shine forth as the ultimate truth, Teikef Umiyad Mamash (speedily and powerfully in our days).

## Searching for G-d

In this week's Parsha Avraham begs Hashem not to destroy Sedom. When introducing Avraham's prayer the Torah says, "And Avraham approached (VaYigash) Hashem and said, will you indeed obliterate a righteous man with the wicked?" (18:23). Many Tzaddikim were able to communicate with Hashem, but with the exception of Moshe Rabbeinu, no one can simply go up to Hashem and request an audience. Hashem is beyond human understanding; he must manifest himself to us. How then, did Avraham go and approach Hashem?

Rashi explains the nature of Avraham's approach to Hashem based on the use of the word VaYigash elsewhere in TaNaCH. We find the word VaYigash in context of war- (Vayigash Yoav)- when Yoav went forward to battle Aram. In the context of appeasement Vayigash Eilav Yehuda- when Yehuda went forward to placate Yosef. And Vayigash Eliyahu HaNavi- when Eliyahu approached Hashem in prayer. So in this instance, Avraham exemplified all the definitions of the word VaYigash when he approached Hashem in prayer. He spoke harshly (slight similarity to war) as he said "will you indeed obliterate a righteous man with the wicked?" He attempted to appease Hashem by asking "is it possible that the judge of all the Earth shall not do justice", and obviously, he prayed.

Be'er Yitzchak offers a novel outlook as to why Rashi was forced to offer a homiletic interpretation referencing all of TaNaCH in explaining Avraham's prayer. He explains that although Hashem is not perceptibly manifest, he answers the call of any who pray to him with sincerity. When the Pasuk says "Avraham approached," it means Avraham was preparing for an encounter with the divine, thus Rashi must explain how Avraham prepared himself inasmuch as the words he used.

Hashem is everywhere we only need to seek Him out to find Him.

*Based in part on a lecture given by The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson ob"m*

**Shlomo  
Laufer**  
*Sophomore*

## **Chesed in Action vs. Chesed as Inaction**

With regard to Avraham Avinu the Navi writes, "Titain Emes LiYaakov, Chesed Li'Avraham" [Tr. You shall give the truth of Yacov, the loving-kindness of Avraham (to the Jewish people)] (7:20). The pasuk emphasizes Avraham's exceptional trait of Chesed, (i.e. goodness, benevolence, charity, and kindness). Rav Shlomo Amar draws a number of insights as to the nature of Avraham's Chesed, from his prayer for Sedom.

**Aaron  
Kattan**  
*Senior*

In Parashas Vayera we read of how Avraham Avinu prayed on behalf of Sedom's residents even though they had gravely sinned and opposed all that Avraham valued or believed in. While Avraham Avinu was the epitome of kindness, the people of Sedom were the epitome of cruelty. Moreover, the people of Sedom believed that were fundamentally justified in their corruption they willfully legislated against acts of charity. Perhaps they had pure intentions at the outset. The Sodomites may have believed that excessive charitable giving might undermine a strong work ethic or have some other negative consequences. Nevertheless, the Sodomite policy of curtailing charity soon spiraled into utter cruelty. This perverse sense of justice stood in direct opposition to Avraham, to him, loving-kindness was life.

When one's opponent is defeated or proven to have been incorrect, it is natural to rejoice or at least feel vindicated. In the case of Sedom, Avraham could have said that his attitudes were correct and that Sedom deserved to face the consequences of its negative actions. Yet, Avraham Avinu was a true Baal Chesed; he truly believed in kindness, it was his way of life. These people may have been his ideological opponents, yet, Avraham Avinu cared for them and prayed for them at the risk of arousing Hashem's anger.

The Midrash says that we have an obligation to emulate our forefathers. When the pasuk attributes Chesed to Avraham as his defining quality ("Chesed Li'Avraham"). It is declaring the unique caliber of Chesed exhibited by Avraham Avinu. His Chesed was beyond the realm of normal selfish behavior, he had reached a level where his Chesed was perfected in the service of Hashem and love for others.

## Decisions, Decisions

The parshiyos of Lech Lecha and Vayera are full of difficult decisions. When Avraham is involved more often than not he makes the correct decision. Lot is a different story. When we first meet Lot he is not a bad guy. He uproots himself from his land, to follow in Avraham's righteous path. When in Mitzrayim, Lot sacrifices personal profit to save Avraham, by guarding Avraham's true identity as Sarah's husband. Rashi goes so far as to describe Lot as a "kasher" or a decent G-d-fearing person. What went wrong? Why did Lot decide to live in the decadent city of Sedom?

Perhaps Lot had many good rationalizations. He may have claimed that he would not be affected by the lifestyle in Sedom and would in fact change its residents for the better. After all, he was Avraham's disciple. Sadly though, we see Lot was wrong. He married an inhospitable Sedomite wife, he declined morally, and was nearly destroyed with the rest of the city. Lot may have been deluding himself, though he believed he was going to Sedom for positive reasons he may have had some nagging ulterior motives, such as a desire to move the most fertile part of the land, and thereby enrich himself, and benefit from the beauty of a land that was said to be like the Garden of Eden. These ulterior motives may have caused him to make poor decisions, that ultimately left him a broken man.

As teenagers, we can learn an immediate, important lesson from the tragedy of Lot's life. We are about to make some of the most important decisions of our lives. As we leave high school, we are faced with many important decisions. In fact the Arizal refers to the critical, formative, teenage years, as the "Sheva Yimai Habi-nyan" or Seven days of Construction. In essence, this means that the decisions we make now, and in the next few years, will set the tone for our entire lives. We must make sure, that when we make these decisions, whatever they may be, for the right reasons, and examine our true motives when making them. We must make sure we do not rationalize our decisions, when in fact we may have harmful ulterior motives. With this perspective, we can choose the portion of Avraham, and not G-d forbid that of Lot.

*Adapted from Mussar Schmuessen Given by Rabbi Zev Meir Friedman, Rabbi Avrum Haar and Rabbi Yehoshua Balkany (Menahel, Beis Yaakov of Boro Park).*

*Transcribed by Hamasmid's Editorial Staff.*

## A Thought to Ponder

When Avraham chases Yishmael and Hagar away from his house Rashi notes that Avraham only sent them away with bread and a jug of water, to the exclusion of gold or silver, despite the fact that Avraham was extremely wealthy. Rashi explains that Avraham *hated* Yishmael because of his evil behavior. This seems highly incongruous with the picture we've painted of Avraham as an unconditional Ba'al Chesed who even prayed for the unredeemable sinners of Sedom, surely Yishmael deserved at least as much consideration!

**Hamasmid  
Staff**

E-mail us your thoughts!

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