

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYERA

NOVEMBER 11-12, 2011

15 HESHVAN 5772

DEDICATIONS : In memory of Ralph S. Cohen - Refael ben Sofie – (My “nephew” Ralph Cohen’s grandfather)

With condolences to the family- Arayat at Congregation Keter Torah, East 23rd and Avenue L.

This Sunday 2:00pm Tehillim followed by Speeches, Minha/arbit

Also leluy nishmat, HELEN BAT ANGELA, YAAKOV BEN SETI and SHALOM RAV BEN CHANA

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Yartzheit of Reb Shlomo Carlebach z’ztl – Please stop by Friday night at the Colish’s for some light refreshments, cash torahs, and beautiful singing 8PM – 11PM. Everyone is invited!

REFUAH SHELEMAH: Tzirel bas Basha, Riki Mehira Rut bat Zerizah, Yisroel Moshe ben Chasya Miriam

Kiddush this week is sponsored by Rafik and Anna Yadgarov in honor of their daughter Suzie's upcoming wedding to Raphi Salzer. Mazal tov to the parents Daniel and Battina Salzer and to the entire Yadgarov and Yusupov family

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

- Mincha at 4:25 – Followed by Kabbalat Shabbat and Arbit (Candle Lighting: 4:23)
- Shaharith: 9:00 followed by a Gala Kiddush Celebration
- Benai Asher Youth Program 10:45 – 11:45, Coordinated by Orah Burstyn
- Mincha follows Kiddush – not before Noon.
- Shabbat ends at 5:22pm – Arbit & Havdalah 5:40pm – Class – The Zohar on Veyera – Apx 6-6:30
- Motzi Shabbat– LIGHTS CAMERA ACTION! led by Sarina Amiel and Riki Waldman – Auditions are underway for our Chanuka Show. Practice will be each Motzi Shabbat immediately following arbit for 45 minutes. Under the supervision of Yosef Colish
- Father Son Learning - The Young Israel begins Motzi Shabbat (6:30) for 1 hour, there will also be a 15 minute interactive class for boys ages 5-7

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

- Sunday Shaharit 8:00 – Followed by breakfast and our Tefilah Class at 8:45am
- Shaharit Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKLY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

- “How to Retire Young & Wealthy” Mon-Fri 6:30 AM - based upon The Duties of the Heart (Gate of Trust) Led by Rabbi Yosef Colish
- Pizmonim Monday Nights 9:30-10:00 Led by Barry Pinto
- Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30 with David, Hal and Michael. Please join us!

SPECIAL EVENTS

- THIS SUNDAY Discovery Seminar at Temple Beth El 12:30 pm – last one was sold out, don’t miss it!
- THIS TUESDAY Annual Sisterhood Meeting November 15th at 8:30 pm in the shul. All men and women are encouraged to come and see how they can volunteer or help out for an event.

- **Sephardic/Young Israel Chanuka Carnival – details to follow. We are looking for volunteers to sit on the committee. Speak with Yosef to get involved**
- **Annual Thanksgiving Day Men’s Football Game Thursday November 24th Bach vs. Sephardic 11 AM. More details to follow - Coordinated by Sam Shetret**
- **Paintball Trip – Bach vs Sephardic November 27th Leaving at 9:30 AM. Speak to Yosef or Sam Shetret to sign up. Must pre-pay \$25 to reserve your spot by November 23rd**
- **Bikur Cholim – Sunday morning December 4 Visit Hoffman Manor, share your smile & make someone’s day! Coordinated by Patti Azizo.**
- **Annual Sisterhood dinner will be held on Tuesday December 13. Our honorees this year are Alan and Karen Cohn. Please reserve the date. Details to follow**

please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Editors Notes

Chantelle came from a class yesterday and posed a question for us to think about this Shabbat. “Does the chesed “acts of kindness” I am involved in or the learning I am focused on make me a better person and if so, how?”

Now although the question evolved from her class that day, the question is one she often asks in various forms. When I am preparing a class, Chantelle will press me on how the class will make those who attend and the one who gives it better people. I recall coming back one night after spending 2 hours discussing the detailed laws of Koshering a spleen and imagined the question that might come.

You’ve never eaten a spleen and you probably never will. You’ve never koshered a spleen and probably never will. You’ve never even touched or seen a spleen up close and probably never will. So what were those last two hours about? How did they make you and the guys you learn with better people?

Luckily she was already sleeping when I got back that night!

But the question is so helpful and has me focus on it when

preparing a class. And although our classes in the Perasha each week evolve from the side of the Zohar, the Arizal, Rabeynu Bachya, the Ohr HaChayim and the Shelah HaKadosh, the punch line almost always is one of mussar and bolsters our efforts to further our ethical and spiritual disciplines.

This week we open the portion and find Abraham on the third day following his circumcision sitting outside his tent in the heat of the day when Hashem appears to him. We hear of no conversation. We have only the word Vayera alluding to the sense of sight. The Zohar explains that each of the senses relate to different sefirot. For example sight represents Hochmah while hearing represents Binah and speech represents Malchut.

In the simplest terms, the “appearance” of G-d alludes to the concentration of pure unfiltered shefa – say light or energy from above of Hochmah. Rashi clarifies the term “in the heat of the day”. Do we really need to know the weather? Rashi says that G-d took the sun from out of its sheath. What is the sheath? In physical terms we might call it the magnetic fields and ozone layer that protect us from the suns deadly radiation and allow us to enjoy and thrive in the sun. In spiritual terms, the Zohar tells us, HeAraat Hochmah

BeLi Hasadim, this refers to the light of the sphere of Hochmah which is unfiltered without the protection of loving kindness.

The Rabbis teach us that there is a light which can be beneficial to the righteous while destructive to the wicked. I sometimes imagine Heaven and Hell as the same place where all find this powerful Heavenly light. Some can bask in this Shefa or Glory of Hashem while the same light burns others.

Rabbi Abittan as I have said would often tell us that the modern world helps us to understand Kabbalah and he loved using electricity as an example.

We can imagine this light as a powerful, high voltage electric current where the wires are uncovered. Touch the wire and one is killed. Thus one might think electric is bad. But insulate the wire and bring the power down through transformers and the electric gives us light, heat, power, cooling, and a world we cannot imagine without it.

As the zohar explains the Chasidim, the acts of kindness are the vessel to catch the light or the wire’s insulation which allows us to use the energy. Our acts of kindness are the vehicles which allow us to utilize and benefit from the light and energy. Without

them, the energy burns us. With them it heals us.

The Rabbi would explain that the definition of a Rasha as a wicked person is somewhat problematic. A better way of understanding the meaning of Rasha is through its letters. Resh – Ratzon or Desire, Shin – Shel or for and Ayin – Atzmo or of one's self. A Rasha is one who lives only for his own desires. He wants everything. He wants the energy. He wants the light. He wants it all. But by neglecting to create the filters, the transformers, the shade and the insulation, eventually all that comes to burn him.

This week we also speak about Sedom. A place of huge, wealth, prosperity and success. A place of unmatched selfishness. A place where life was all about them and fulfilling their own desires. And in the end they are burned with fire from above and fire below.

We see it in our own generation and stories fill the news. The fruits of ill begotten gains often come to poison their owner.

So lets us consider each time we fulfill a commandment, each time we learn something, each time we involve ourselves in chesed, "How does this make me a better person"? Let us find the answers, build our own transformers and insulated cables, and bring down the light from Heaven as a light of healing, prosperity, peace and happiness for us and our children. Amen!

Shabbat Shalom,
David Bibi

PS ... Following up on last week. Wow, so many comments and so many of you enjoyed what we wrote. My kids are searching for the tape so if it comes up, we'll let you know. Finally, Ramban

using Rambam's Moreh Nevuchim as a source suggests that in fact Abraham was born in Syria and only went with his father to Ur Kasdim leaving his older brother Nahor in Syria. Haran would have been born in Ur Kasdim after they moved there. That's where Haran died. And in reconsidering I don't know if the name Haran really could have much to do with the town of Charan where Nahor lives and where Abraham and his father eventually move to after fleeing Ur Kasdim.

PSS ... If you have been reading the newsletter for years, you'll know that when my children spend the year in Israel, I push them to write for the newsletter. And as you tell me, even if you have never met the children, you know them through these past 17 years of newsletters. This year as you should know by now, Mikhayla is in Israel for the year. We'll be visiting her, the week after next B'H. She just sent me the following ...

We decided to pull an all nighter and pray vatikin since we have an in-shabbat this weekend and won't be traveling today (Friday). I sat with my friends Danielle and Jane in the beit midrash and from combining different thoughts from some of our classes, we came up with this... Hope you enjoy it.

The Means to the End Parshat Vayeira

Source 1: Hamlet "To be or not to be..."

Hamlet is debating whether to do what he needs to do (avenge his father)- which could lead to death (which wouldn't necessarily be so bad) or whether to not and then just suffer. The dilemma is what if death bears bad dreams. If afterlife was definitely good then when things got bad everyone would just commit suicide, but no

one knows. The problem is he doesn't know what death provides. The way he sees it is, it's better to suffer in this world, where you know the realm of suffering; whereas afterlife is uncertain and could potentially bear greater suffering. He says knowledge makes us cowards. This is because without knowledge you can't make decisions because you fear uncertainty; in this case uncertainty being death.

Source 2: The Road Not Taken, Robert Frost

In this poem the traveler has come to a fork in the road and must make a decision as to which path he will choose. First he looks to knowledge to decide, one road is usually taken more but on this day they both look the same. At the end he says he took the road less traveled, but if both roads look the same then what does that mean? The significance is that by making the decision he left one road not taken. His decision created the road not taken. The point is that, unlike Hamlet he made a decision. The decision itself is what the author sees as the important aspect in life.

Source 3: Kohelet

The book of Kohelet contains four extreme philosophies that debate why live. Nothing is remembered anyone so what is the point of living? The book concludes that the point of life is to fear and observe G-d, because it is G-d who remembers all. People only acknowledge what happens during the moment of triumph. However, once it's over no one remembers. For example, if one was asked who created the television? No one remembers, and no one cares. G-d, on the other hand, remembers all our deeds, both good and bad. Therefore, it is G-d for

whom we should live for. The end point is unimportant, it is the process that is what matters.

To summarize the past 3 sources, we must only choose based on action and based on what G-d says is right. It's not about knowledge (Hamlet), and it's not about simply making the decision (Frost) it is about making a decision based on G-d.

In this week's *parsha*, *Parshat Vayeira*, two major events occur. One was the *seudah* for the angels, in which Avraham did his defining attribute of welcoming his guests, even though the angels didn't need anything from him. The *seudah* had no results, because angels can't actually eat, all was important/significant because of the intent on which Avraham did it. The second main event was Akeidah Yitzchak. Here there was also no end result, because Avraham did not end up killing Yitzchak. The whole Akeidah was possible because of his intention. It was the buildup and his willingness to do anything in the name of G-d, that was the significant factor of this event.

Both the Akeidah and the *Seudah* show that the importance of a mitzvah lies in the intentions in which you do it. Your thoughts, your feelings and your passion are what give the mitzvah its value. Without Avraham's intent both the Akeidah and *Seudah* would've meant nothing, for there was no result. Like in the previous sources the importance lies within the process of how a decision was made, rather than the result.

Today we live in a world where product is what matters, not the means it takes to get there. In school people care what

the final grade is, rather than the hours of studying and working it took to get that grade. But in torah, the intent and process is what matters. In davening, if you daven without intent it's like a body without a soul. The importance of a mitzvah such as davening is in doing it through, passion, love and yearning to be close with G-d. As it said in Kohelet, G-d is the only one to live for, because He is the only one who sees the reasoning behind our actions and remembers all.

From this we hope that we can all, find happiness in every mitzvah, and put the effort into the process it takes to getting to this level. Also, if no result is seen, it shouldn't be discouraging, because that is not what matters. G-d must be the guiding force in our decisions, through this we should pave our own roads of life, not through intellect but through meaning.

Shabbat Shalom, Danielle, Jane, and Mikhayla

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The three angels appear to Avraham and foretell the birth of Yitzchak. Upon hearing the news, Sarah laughs to herself.

2nd Aliya: The angels depart to destroy Sodom, and Hashem [G-d] tells Avraham about His plans for destroying Sodom. Pasuk 18:18-19 proclaims G-d's confidence in Avraham to teach the world the concept of justice. Avraham negotiates, unsuccessfully, on behalf of Sodom.

3rd Aliya: The story of the destruction of Sodom is told. Lot's generosity to the "two visitors" is

rewarded and he, his wife, and only two of their children are saved from Sodom.

4th Aliya: Lot's wife looks back upon the destruction of Sedom and dies, and Lot and his two daughters escape into the mountains. Lot's daughters conspire to rebuild humankind, and taking advantage of Lot's drunkenness, they become pregnant from Lot resulting in the birth of Ammon and Moav. Avraham encounters Abimelech after which Sarah gives birth to Yitzchak in the year 2048.

5th Aliya: Yishmael and Hagar are forced out of Avraham's home, and an angel reassures Hagar of Yishmael's destiny.

6th Aliya: Abimelech and his general Phichol resolve their conflict with Avraham over water rights, and they "sign" a covenant of peace.

7th Aliya: In the year 2085, when Avraham was 137 and Yitzchak was 37, Avraham is commanded to sacrifice Yitzchak. This amazing story heralds the end of Avraham and Sarah's era, and the beginning of Yitzchak and Rivkah's era.

Sometime around the year 3043 - 705 b.c.e., Elisha took over the mantle of prophecy from Eliyahu. Elisha served the Jewish people as their mentor and protector, and this week's Haftorah relates two of the miraculous incidents that he performed. The first story is of Ovadya's widow and the pitcher of oil that continued to pour until she had enough oil to pay off all her debts and make a decent living.

The second is the Shunamis who was unable to conceive children. After being blessed with a son, the child dies and Elisha performs the miracle of resurrecting the

boy's life. In both instances, basic human needs were satisfied through the righteous individuals trust in the Navi and in Hashem's providence. The widow's husband was the great Ovadya who risked his own life and fortune to protect 100 prophets from the murderous purge of Achav and Ezevel. The Shunamis and her husband were wealthy, G-d fearing people who generously provided for all who needed. Both women could have expected that their basic needs for income and family be deservedly provided by G-d.

The theme of Vayera is trusting Hashem beyond the limits of rational and assumed justice. As with Sarah and Avraham, the trust that Ovadya's widow and the Shunamis had in Hashem was unrelated to their limited human expectations. They trusted Hashem to provide as He saw fit, without any strings attached.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“My Master, if I have found favor in your eyes please do not pass by Your servant.” (Beresheet 18:3)

A story told by Rabbi E. Nisenbaum: A visitor from out of town entered a shul on Shabbat morning and sat down in an empty seat. A few minutes later, a member of the shul approached the guest and informed him that he had taken his seat. The guest mumbled an apology and uncomfortably searched the room for yet another seat.

After prayers the Rabbi chastised the congregant for his insensitivity towards the guest. “You should have let the guest stay in your seat and spared him his discomfort,” he said.

The man, however, argued with the Rabbi. “Doesn't the Talmud (Berachot 6b) say that a person should designate a place for his prayer? That's my designated spot!”

“That is true,” the Rabbi Said with a smile. “The Talmud's source for praying in a designated place is learned from Abraham Abinu, who designated a place to speak to Hashem (Beresheet 19:27). Yet the very same Abraham excused himself from speaking to Hashem in order to tend to his guests! The Talmud (Shabbat 127a) learns from this that receiving guests is more important than receiving the Divine Presence. We see that it is more important to tend to a guest's needs than it is to pray in a designated place.” Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“For [Hagar] said, ‘Let me not see the death of the child’” (Beresheet 21:16)

Hagar moved away from her son, Yishmael, when he was dying of thirst because, as she said, “I can't bear to see him in this state.” One of the commentators points out that although this may be acceptable for Hagar, it is not an attribute for a Jewish mother. Even when things are as difficult to cope with as someone in extreme thirst, a mother stays by her child to see what can be done.

We must apply this to most of life's situations, not only the dangerous ones. It may be more pleasant for a parent not to know when a child is doing something wrong, rather than confront the child and face the problem. This is not the way of life for a Jewish parent. One must be involved in his child's upbringing, and if anything needs correcting, one must face the situation directly. It may be

unpleasant but it is the only way that will yield positive results in our children. Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

FRAMES One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda

There is something about a frame that makes a picture beautiful. Whether it is a family photo or an expensive piece of art, a frame takes it to the next level. Choosing the right frame for a picture, and the setting in which it will be placed, are major factors in determining how pleasing it will look to the eye of the beholder. Different frame, different reaction.

People have free will regarding how they react to any given situation. In fact, two people may see the same event and react quite differently from one another. One may sit calmly and “let it slide,” while another may blow up and react violently. It depends on how each sees the “picture.”

A good technique to control temper is to re-frame pictures that aggravate. One way to react and to defuse an otherwise explosive situation is to say: “This is just a test. Hashem wants me to grow, so he sent me this situation to see if I can control myself.” Another is to say: “This, too, shall pass. It always does!” Or perhaps frustrating circumstances call for a frame that says: “The reward is commensurate with the pain.”

When something or someone is about to trigger a negative reaction from you, stop and reconsider your response. It only takes a minute to take the picture out of the unattractive frame it is in and reframe it, thereby turning it into a beautiful work that will lead to personal improvement and growth.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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The Child's Needs Come First
 Toward the end of Parashat Vayera we read the story of Hagar, Sara's maidservant who married Abraham and bore him a child, Yishmael. Abraham was forced to send Hagar and Yishmael away from the home due to the threat that Yishmael posed to his younger son, Yishak, and the Torah tells that Hagar and Yishmael wandered in the desert. Their water rations were depleted, and Yishmael nearly died of thirst. Hagar placed Yishmael under a bush and left him there, moving a far distance away from her child, because she did not want to see him die (21:16).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Germany, 1808-1888) noted that Hagar's conduct in this episode is antithetical to the model of parenting that we are to follow. Rabbi Hirsch writes that a Jewish parent never abandons his or her child, regardless of what is entailed. Hagar put her own emotions and feelings before her child's needs, leaving him alone in his time of dire distress to spare herself the torment of watching him suffer. The proper model of parenting is one which suspends all personal feelings and emotions when the child's needs are at stake. We must never abandon a child or deny him his needs because of our own personal concerns. Parents must be prepared to make difficult sacrifices on behalf of their children's education and upbringing. This means being prepared to forego on certain material luxuries for the sake of paying for Torah education and providing the child with the extra

help or therapy that he might need. True, it might be difficult for parents to accept a lower standard of living and forego on vacations or a luxury car in order to pay for their children's education and, if necessary, special services. But this is the duty of a Jewish parent, which trumps personal concerns and material ambitions.

A particularly sensitive area where this issue commonly arises is Shidduchim. It occasionally happens that a boy will bring home a girl he had been dating, who is herself a worthy and suitable match, but the parents disapprove because of personal concerns, usually involving reputation and social stature. They might not think very highly of the family, or the family might have less money, and the parents will thus worry what their friends will say when they hear about the match. Of course, parents should intervene if their child wishes to marry somebody who is truly unsuitable. But they must never intervene out of personal concerns, because of their personal feelings. It is wrong to cause a child pain and abandon him to spare oneself unease.

The story of Hagar and Yishmael teaches us what parenting should not be. Our model of parenting is one which places the needs of our children before our own, being prepared to sacrifice our own wishes and desires for the sake of our children's happiness. We don't abandon children to spare ourselves; we remain with them, offering all the help and support their need, despite the sacrifices that this demands.

Rabbi Wein

The Lord appears to Avraham at a very strange time. He is

convalescing from his surgical circumcision; the day is very hot and it is high noon; and he is apparently looking for human company as he sits at the entrance to his tent. And even though he does espouse three strangers and invites them in, the Lord, so to speak, interrupts this happening by appearing just then to Avraham. He is left conflicted as to which of his meetings he should give precedence to.

The rabbis deduce from Avraham's behavior that greeting and hosting human guests even takes precedence over communicating with the Divine Spirit! But the fact that such a juxtaposition of events occurs at the same time is itself a great lesson in life and faith.

The Lord appears to people at strange and unpredictable times. To some it is in sickness and despair. To others it is at moments of joy and seeming success. Some glimpse the Divine in the beauty and complexity of nature while others find their solace and epiphany in the halls of study and in challenges to the intellect. Since we are all different in nature and outlook, the Lord customizes His appearance to each one of us to fit our unique circumstances.

Thus people experience their own sense of spirituality and connection to their inner essence and to their Creator differently and at different moments in their lives. Some are frightened into such an experience while others enter into it with serenity and confidence. But we can certainly agree that there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to dealing with our souls and the eternal One.

The Lord appears to Avraham at the moment of his hospitality and tolerance towards strangers. In

the tent of Avraham and Sarah, creatures can enter as Bedouin Arabs covered with desert dust and leave refreshed as radiant angels. It is in the service of others and in the care for the needs of others that the Lord appears in the tent of Avraham and Sarah. It is in the goodness of their hearts that the Lord manifests His presence, so to speak, to Avraham and Sarah.

Every one of us has traits and a nature that defines us. Just as chesed – goodness, kindness, and care for others – defined Avraham and Sarah, so too are we defined by our concerns, habits and behavior. And it is within that background that the Lord appears to each of us individually, if we are wise enough to recognize His presence, so to speak.

The prophet Yirmiyahu teaches us that in times of trouble and sickness the Lord appears to us "from afar." But, nevertheless, He appears to us. The great Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk was asked: "Where can one find God?" He answered in his usual direct fashion: "Wherever one is willing to allow Him to enter." The performance of the acts of Torah and goodness, the bending of our traits and will towards service and concern for others, are the means by which we will glimpse the Divine presence within ourselves and in our homes - in health and contentment

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky -
Parsha Parables
No Laughing Matter**

It began in this week's Torah portion and continues to this very day. The theological battle between Yitzchak and Yishmael seems to have begun not long after the Torah tells us about the former's miraculous birth. Yishmael, born to Avraham's

concubine, Hagar, was older than Isaac by 13 years, and it seems that there was a rivalry from the get go -- a rivalry that led to discord between Sora and Hagar which led to Hagar being driven from Avraham's home.

The Torah tells us, "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mtzacheik -- making merry" (Genesis 21:9). She immediately directed her husband, "Drive out this handmaid and her son, for the son of this handmaid shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac!" (ibid v.10).

And for what reason? What had Yishmael done that Sora asked that he be driven from the home? The Torah uses a curious expression to define the crime which led to Yishmael and Hagar's expulsion, "He was mtzacheik -- making merry". What could be wrong with "making merry"?

Rashi is quick to point out that "making merry" does not mean that Yishmael was preparing for a night at a comedy club; he goes on to explain that the word mtzacheik -- translated literally as "making light" or "making merry" is used quite differently in other contexts. In fact that very word is used to connote the three cardinal sins of Judaism: idolatry, illicit relations and murder. "The root of mtzacheik" says Rashi is "an expression of idolatry, as it is said (Exodus: 32-6) "and they rose up to make merry" (קָרְחָהּ) . It is also an expression of illicit sexual relations, as it is said (below 39:17) "to mock (קָרְחָהּ) me." Additionally it is an expression of murder, as it is said (II Sam. 2:14) "Let the boys get up now and sport (וַיִּשְׂחָקוּ) before us, etc."

Powerful stuff. bad stuff. perhaps the stuff that has people drive young men from their homes.

But what bothers me is the choice of that word -- mtzacheik -- one that can be used for murder just as well as for laughter and joy. It is the very word that was used to give Isaac his name -- Yitzchak! In fact, in naming her son Yitzchak, Sora actually said, actually said, "God has made joy for me; whoever hears will rejoice over me as the word קָרְחָהּ: Yitzchak means that 'they will rejoice for me.'

Why then, would the crimes of brother Yishmael be termed as mtzacheik the very word used to name Yitzchak? Why would the word that is used for joy and merriment be used to term the crimes that ultimately led to Ishmael being driven together with his mother from Avraham's home?

Shortly before the stock-market crash of 1929, Joseph P. Kennedy, the affluent and equally notorious patriarch of the Kennedy clan, sold his stock and divested himself from the stock market. He escaped with his fortune intact unlike most investors who ultimately lost all of their money.

When asked how he knew to get out of the market, Kennedy replied, "I was having my shoes shined when the bootblack suggested that I invest in a particular stock. I thought to myself, "When my shoeshine boy starts offering stock tips, it's time to get out of the market."

The Message

Perhaps the Torah uses the very words that once defined Yitzchak to explicate why Sora drove him out of the house. If Yishmael's labeled his actions as mtzacheik, the very same expression used to define the essence of his younger brother Yitzchak, then she understood that trouble was brewing. if yishmael claimed that he is the true "Yitzchak" and he defined his atrocities with the very word used

to describe the elevated joy of Isaac's arrival, then there was going to be problems of co-existence. Yishmael had to go.

I often wonder when I hear the descendants of Yishmael claiming the identity, the geography, the sanctity of Yitzchak as their very own. It scares me when the holiest place in Judaism, the Temple Mount suddenly becomes one of the holiest places in Islam. When our enemies assume our identities in which the term "making merry" defines their abhorrent behavior, then indeed, it is no laughing matter. (c) 2011 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Ricky Cohen

I live for my parents	No
I live for my business	No
I live for my music, my writing, my running	No, No, No
I live for my husband	No
I live for my children	No

You live for you

I am a professional	No
I am a writer, a musician	No
I am a daughter, a parent, a spouse	No, No, No

You are you

You dare not live for your parents, your business, your music
 You dare not live for your writing, your running
 You dare not live for your husband
 You dare not live for your children.
 Your parents, your business, your music, your writing, your running, your children -
 are all pieces added on to you that are important
 but that must be part of a you that claims you first.
 You must live for you.

Excerpt from: I Once Asked a Wise Man by Ricky Cohen.

The question asked from the first generation of man and in every generation is:

"For whom and for what do I live?"

"Do I live to enrich the lives of others - or to enrich my life?" "Will my eternity be defined by what I've given or how I've gained?"

These questions don't simply speak to the notion of hesed (kindness) and giving back versus doing what I need or want for me. They speak to how one does the good things he does, and what perspective one has when he builds his wealth and success. The answers to these questions are complex and their implications very serious.

The confusion on this issue seems to be embedded into the words uttered at the very point of man's creation. As man and woman are brought onto the planet they are blessed with the ability – and the mandate, to fill the earth, master it – and eat from it. In fact, man is given the clear directive that all that preceded him is for him (Genesis chapter 1, verses 27-30).

This perspective seems to be further affirmed when G-d reaches out to Abraham and tells him to leave his homeland, family, and belongings, and begin again – so that he will be blessed with wealth, fame and lineage. The words clearly imply that Abraham was called upon for a test within a test. The first test was to abandon all that he had -and the second was to do it all for his own sake! The implication is that had he done it purely for the sake of his Maker he would have failed this test.

And it is made clear in relatively short order that Abraham was rewarded with all that was

promised to him. Wealth: On his return from Egypt. Fame: In the war of the four kings versus the five kings. And children: Upon his being blessed with Isaac.

So it seems that man's role in life is to build himself and ultimately be personally rewarded for his building – right on target with the description in the story of creation.

But what about Abraham being described as the one who personified the notion of self-sacrifice and complete submission to the Almighty - isn't that the Abraham we know?

The answer presents humanity with the greatest challenge of all its challenges -demanding of man a place in this world that is fragile and tenuous. In the words of Rabbi Matis Weinberg in his Frameworks series: The motivation for man's actions must be the service of his Creator, yet the objective must be that by doing so he will come fully into his own.

In other words, it's not about selflessness – doing completely for others, nor is it about doing simply for me, it's a complex interwovenness of motivation and goal, incentive and desired outcome. One must not be without the other.

As Rabbi Weinberg so beautifully states: "...the only gift we can give to the One who has everything (the Almighty) is to become fully and wholly ourselves..."

So it's always about my children, my interests, my achievements – and it's never about them. It's about all that I touch and beget - but it's mostly about what I become.

So one must ask himself: "Who am I?"

"Can I claim an identity that is exclusive of what I do, whom I've helped, and who and what I brought into this world?"

The answer is: I must be able to do so.

I must be able to claim an identity that is defined by:

- The fineness of my character and the fact that it is more refined today than it was a few months back.
- My growing hunger to understand G-d's world, and my achievements in that understanding.
- My patience, quietude and joyfulness – true reflections of a person's character.
- My measurably escalating sense of awe and pride, humility and strength.

Abraham was sent on a journey to become himself – the same journey each of us is sent on. In the process he was given wealth, fame and children. But most important, in the process he became Abraham.

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United
Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth**

Walking Together

There is one image that haunts us across the millennia, fraught with emotion. It is the image of a man and his son walking side-by-side across a lonely landscape of shaded valleys and barren hills. The son has no idea where he is going and why. The man, in pointed contrast, is a maelstrom of emotion. He knows exactly where he is going and why, but he can't make sense of it at all.

The God who gave him a son is now telling him to sacrifice his son. On the one hand, the man is full of fear: am I really going to lose the one thing that makes my life meaningful, the son for whom I prayed all those years? On the other hand, part of him is saying: just as this child was impossible – I was old, my wife was too old –

yet here he is. So, though it seems impossible, I know that God is not going to take him from me. That is not the God I know and love. He would never have told me to call this child Isaac, meaning "he will laugh" if He meant to make him and me cry.

The father is in a state of absolute cognitive dissonance, yet – though he can make no sense of it – he trusts in God and betrays to his son no sign of emotion. Vayelchu shenehem yachdav. The two of them walked together.

There is just one moment of conversation between them:

Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"
"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.
"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"
Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." (Gen. 22: 7-8)

What worlds of unstated thoughts and unexpressed emotions lie behind those simple words. Yet as if to emphasise the trust between father and son, and between both and God, the text repeats: Vayelchu shenehem yachdav. The two of them walked together.

As I read those words, I find myself travelling back in time, and in my mind's eye I see my father and me walking back from shul on Shabbat. I was four or five years old at the time, and I think I understood then, even if I couldn't put it into words, that there was something sacred in that moment. During the week I would see the worry in my father's face as he was trying to make a living in difficult times. But on Shabbat all those worries were somewhere else. Vayelchu shenehem yachdav. We walked together in the peace and beauty of the holy

day. My father was no longer a struggling businessman. Today he was a Jew breathing God's air, enjoying God's blessings, and he walked tall.

Shabbat was my mother making the food that gave the house its special Shabbat smell: the soup, the kugel, the lockshen. As she lit candles, she could have been the bride, the queen, we sang about in Lecha Dodi and Eshet Chayil. I had a sense, even then, that this was a holy moment when we were in the presence of something larger than ourselves, that embraced other Jews in other lands and other times, something I later learned we call the Shekhinah, the Divine presence.

We walked together, my parents, my brothers and me. The two generations were so different. My father came from Poland. My brothers and I were "proper Englishmen." We knew we would go places, learn things and pursue careers they could not. But we walked together, two generations, not having to say that we loved one another. We weren't a demonstrative family but we knew of the sacrifices our parents made for us and the pride we hoped to bring them. We belong to different times, different worlds, had different aspirations, but we walked together.

Then I find my imagination fast-forwarding to August this year, to those unforgettable scenes in Britain – in Tottenham, Manchester, Bristol – of young people rampaging down streets, looting shops, smashing windows, setting fire to cars, robbing, stealing, assaulting people. Everyone asked why. There were no political motives. It was not a racial clash. There were no religious undertones.

Of course, the answer was as clear as day but no one wanted to

say so. In the space of no more than two generations, a large part of Britain has quietly abandoned the family, and decided that marriage is just a piece of paper. Britain became the country with the highest rate of teenage mothers, the highest rate of single parent families, and the highest rate – 46% in 2009 – of births outside marriage in the world.

Marriage and cohabitation are not the same thing, though it is politically incorrect to say so. The average length of cohabitation is less than two years. The result is that many children are growing up without their biological father, in many cases not even knowing who their father is. They live, at best, with a succession of stepfathers. It is a little-known but frightening fact that the rate of violence between stepfathers and stepchildren is 80 times that between natural fathers and their children.

The result is that in 2007, a UNICEF report showed that Britain's children are the unhappiest in the developed world – bottom of a league of 26 countries. On 13 September 2011, another report by UNICEF, compared British parents unfavourably with their counterparts in Sweden and Spain. It showed that British parents try to buy the love of their children by giving them expensive clothes and electronic gadgets – "compulsive consumerism". They fail to give their children what they most want, and costs nothing at all: their time.

Nowhere do we see more clearly the gap between Jewish and secular values today than here. We live in a secular world that has accumulated more knowledge than all previous generations combined, from the vast cosmos to the structure of DNA, from superstring theory to

the neural pathways of the brain, and yet it has forgotten the simple truth that a civilisation is as strong as the love and respect between parent and child – Vayelchu shenehem yachdav, the ability of the generations to walk together.

Jews are a formidably intellectual people. We have our Nobel prize-winning physicists, chemists, medical scientists and games theorists. Yet as long as there is a living connection between Jews and our heritage, we will never forget that there is nothing more important than home, the sacred bond of marriage, and the equally sacred bond between parent and child. Vayelchu shenehem yachdav.

And if we ask ourselves why is it that Jews so often succeed, and succeeding, so often give to others of their money and time, and so often make an impact beyond their numbers: there is no magic, no mystery, no miracle. It is simply that we devote our most precious energies to bringing up our children. Never more so than on Shabbat when we cannot buy our children expensive clothes or electronic gadgets, when we can only give them what they most want and need – our time.

Jews knew and know and will always know what today's chattering classes are in denial about, namely that a civilisation is as strong as the bond between the generations. That is the enduring image of this week's parsha: the first Jewish parent, Abraham, and the first Jewish child, Isaac, walking together toward an unknown future, their fears stilled by their faith. Lose the family and we will eventually lose all else. Sanctify the family and we will have something more precious than wealth or power or success: the love between the generations that is the greatest

gift God gives us when we give it to one another.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"For now I know that you fear G-d" (22:12)

The previous deeds of Abraham certainly demonstrated very great fear of G-d. Yet in order to earn the title of 'Yere Elokim' it was necessary to demonstrate that he would not fail to give even his dearest possession for Hashem's service.

"For now I know" means: now I have made known to the world. The test was made for Abraham's benefit (the word Nissah/test means to elevate), but also for the benefit of all who would read the story in the Torah. All men must know Abraham.

"Every man that fears Hashem, his words are obeyed" (Berachot 6B). For this merit, Abraham was "elevated by G-d" (Nesi Elokim 23:6) in the eyes of all men in his lifetime and ever after.

But even more was Abraham "elevated (in the eyes) of Hashem". This tenth test had purified his heart even more than the nine previous tests and thereby Abraham attained the pinnacle of true greatness. "For now I know" also means: now I see that you have become truly perfect.

Thus the test had the purpose of making Abraham truly perfect, and also to make known to men the perfection of Abraham.

Quoted from "The Beginning" By R' Miller Z'TL

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