

מאמרי תורה - Torah Talk



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Parashat Vayera
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פרשת וירא
י"ח במרחשון תשע"ט

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 18:1-22:24

In this *parasha*, the Torah continues with the adventures of Avraham and Sarah, including the announcement of the impending birth of Yitzchak and his actual birth, the destruction of S'dom, the exile of Hagar and Yishmael from Avraham's house, and the famous episode of *Akeidat Yitzchak* (the Binding of Isaac).

Before the destruction of S'dom, Avraham argues with Hashem, trying to talk God out of destroying the city (18:23-33):

כג וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם, וַיֹּאמֶר: הֲאֵף תִּסְפָּה, צְדִיק עִם-רָשָׁע. כד אוֹלֵי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים, בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר; הֲאֵף תִּסְפָּה וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא לְמָקוֹם, לְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצְּדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ. כה חָלְלָה לָךְ מַעֲשֵׂת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה, לְהַמִּית צְדִיק עִם-רָשָׁע, וְהָיָה כְּצְדִיק, כָּרָשָׁע; חָלְלָה לָךְ--הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל-הָאָרֶץ, לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט. כו וַיֹּאמֶר ה', אִם-אֶמְצָא בְּסֹדִם חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר--וְנִשְׂאתִי לְכָל-הַמָּקוֹם, בְּעִבּוֹרָם. כז וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם, וַיֹּאמֶר: הֲנִה-נָא הוֹאֵלְתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל-ה', וְאַנְכִי עֹפֵר וְאֶפֶר. כח אוֹלֵי יַחֲסֵרוֹן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצְּדִיקִים, חֲמִשָּׁה-הַתְּשֻׁחִית בַּחֲמִשָּׁה, אֶת-כָּל-הָעִיר; וַיֹּאמֶר, לֹא אֲשַׁחִית, אִם-אֶמְצָא שָׁם, אַרְבָּעִים וְחֲמִשָּׁה. כט וַיִּסָּף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו, וַיֹּאמֶר, אוֹלֵי יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁם, אַרְבָּעִים; וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה, בְּעִבּוֹר הָאֲרָבָעִים. ל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-נָא יַחַר לְה', וְאִדְבָּרָה--אוֹלֵי יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁם, שְׁלֹשִׁים; וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲנִה-נָא הוֹאֵלְתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל ה'--אוֹלֵי יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁם, עֶשְׂרִים; וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית, בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרִים. לב וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-נָא יַחַר לְה', וְאִדְבָּרָה אֶד-הַפְּעַם--אוֹלֵי יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁם, עֶשְׂרָה; וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחִית, בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרָה. לג וַיִּלֶּךְ ה'--כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלָה, לְדַבֵּר אֶל-אַבְרָהָם; וְאַבְרָהָם, שָׁב לְמָקוֹמוֹ.

23 Avraham drew near, and said: 'Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Perhaps there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep away and not forgive the place for the

fifty righteous that are in there? 25 It should be far from You to do after this manner, to kill the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from You; shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?' 26 And Hashem said: 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will forgive all the place for their sake.' 27 Avraham answered and said: 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak to Hashem, and I am but dust and ashes. 28 Perhaps there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; will You destroy all the city for lack of five?' And Hashem said: 'I will not destroy it, if I find there forty five.' 29 And he spoke to Hashem yet again, and said: 'Perhaps there shall be forty found there.' And Hashem said: 'I will not do it for the forty's sake.' 30 And he said: 'Oh, let not Hashem be angry, and I will speak. Perhaps there shall thirty be found there.' And Hashem said: 'I will not do it, if I find thirty there.' 31 And he said: 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak to Hashem. Perhaps there shall be twenty found there.' And Hashem said: 'I will not destroy it for the twenty's sake.' 32 And he said: 'Oh, let not Hashem be angry, and I will speak yet but this once. Perhaps ten shall be found there.' And Hashem said: 'I will not destroy it for the ten's sake.' 33 Then Hashem went away, as soon as Hashem had left off speaking to Avraham; and Avraham returned to his place.

It seems like it would take a great deal of temerity to speak to Hashem the way Avraham does here, chastising and challenging the Almighty. Even with all of his disclaimers of "I am but dust and ashes" and "Let not Hashem be angry," Avraham exhibits a good amount of *chutzpah*. How could Avraham think that this behavior was okay?

One possible answer may be found in the thought of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1810), who followed Avraham's example of taking Hashem to task – in this case, for the sake of the people of Yisrael. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak believed that the goal of life in general, and of faith in particular, is to be in permanent communication with God. This communication is possible only when a person is happy and cheerful in appreciation for what God has given, and when a person consciously talks to God on a continuous basis.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak would appeal to the Almighty with his requests, but not for himself personally, rather for the Jewish people. People called Rabbi Levi Yitzchak "a defender of Yisrael," saying, "When we remember Reb Levi Yitzchak, the strictness of Heaven's justice softens." There is a legendary prayer attributed to him,

in which the rabbi challenges God directly: "I, Levi Yitzchak, the son of Sarah from Berditchev, have come to have a trial with You on behalf of Yisrael, Your people. What do You want from Yisrael, from Your people? You have given them famine and pogroms and suffering, and You will hold them responsible for not behaving in accordance with Your will?" Just like Avraham, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak challenged Hashem, and just like Avraham, he did so for the sake of others, not for himself.

Every generation needs a *meilitz yosher*, an eloquent defender before the Throne of Glory. People will sin; Hashem will respond to pleas of mercy from an articulate advocate.

Let us remember in our own prayers, in our personal daily communication with God, to be one of the champions of Am Yisrael, the Jewish people.

Shabbat shalom.

For Discussion:

- Who do you think exists in this generation who is a *meilitz yosher*, an articulate advocate for humanity, before Hashem?
- If you could interview Hashem, what kind of questions would you ask?
- Compose a prayer to Hashem that has nothing to do with you personally, but is an eloquent request on behalf of someone else.