



Parashat Vayera 5772 - #209

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On the Parashah... Avraham's Will Indicates G-d's Will

[Tal Chermon]

Avraham's discussion with Hashem over the inhabitants of Sedom was not a prayer or a petition – it was a debate. Avraham argued with Him, saying: it is inconceivable and sacrilegious that the judge of the entire universe should perform such an unjust act (Bereshit 18:25). This debate in fact paralleled the deliberations that were taking place in the Heavenly Court on the fate of Sedom (Sha'arei Orah). While different Divine attributes, so to speak, were hammering out the issue above, Avraham was like a radio receiver with a large antenna, receiving the heavenly broadcast. He then acted as the mouthpiece for the quality of kindness. Because of his close affinity to, his love of and his faith in G-d, G-d revealed His own will through him, so that Avraham was in fact expressing Hashem's own inner will.

This is the reason that the righteous are able to decree, and Hashem fulfills their desire (See Shabbat 59b and Taanit 23a). Or, in even more extreme cases, that the righteous are able to overturn G-d's decree (Moed Katan 16a). All this does not mean, G-d forbid, that G-d wants one thing, while the righteous wants another and that Hashem changes His mind. No, there can be no inner change in the essence of G-d or of His will. Simply, the righteous person's will is one aspect of G-d's will and he expresses this particular point vocally.

This is also the explanation for why a curse pronounced by a Torah scholar, even if undeserved, is fulfilled (Makkot 11a and elsewhere). The curse is really a Divine protest against a particular state of affairs. And even though not all the conditions for its implementation apply, the protest stands. As, for example, when King David excavated the foundation of the Temple, the waters of the depth surged up and wanted to flood the world. King David thought of inscribing the Divine Name on a shard and casting it into the depths in order to quell the waters. There was, however, a halachic doubt: did the saving of the world justify the erasing of the Divine Name that would

inevitably result from casting the shard into the depths? King David asked if anyone knew the answer, but no one replied. Only when King David threatened that anyone who knew the Halachah but did not speak up would be strangled, did Achitopel respond and say that it was permitted. Despite the fact that Achitopel revealed the answer in the end, King David's curse (inspired by a spark of the Divine will) clung to him and Achitopel died by strangulation (As described in Shmuel 2 17:23). This happened because Achitophel was in essence a negative personality, even though he did not act criminally on this specific occasion.

And thus we see that Avraham is a truly righteous person, whose own will is a faithful reflection of the Divine will.

Rav Aviner on...

Rabbi Binyamin Eisner – The Shofar of Rav Kook

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Lech Lecha 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Following much suffering, the pure soul of the great man, Rabbi Binyamin Eisner, z"l, has ascended to heaven. Who is a great man? One who recognizes the greatness of an outstanding figure and follows in his path. That is what our friend Rav Binyamin did. All his life he was drawn to our great master, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook, and he humbly used to say: "To speak of a great man, one must be great oneself, and since I am not great, I will not speak about Rav Kook. Rather, we shall attempt, together, to learn his writings."

Indeed, Rav Binyamin devoted his whole life to being the Shofar of Rav Kook, no more and no less. He was a gentle Shofar, a clear Shofar, a heartening Shofar, a profound Shofar.

All his life he taught the works of Orot, teaching faith, love of the Nation, and patience vis-à-vis the Jewish State. All his life he explained, with infinite patience, "Torat Eretz Yisrael" – the unique Land-of-Israel-based approach to Torah. All his life he built Eretz Yisrael. Torah scholars are called "builders". He built up Eretz Yisrael in the spiritual sense, by being a faithful emissary of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook and his son Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook.

Our thoughts are with you, our dear friend, shepherd, teacher and mentor. You had a great deal more to build and to teach, and enormous abilities to carry on with your work, but "the Sefer Torah is now hidden away"...

Still, Rav Binyamin remains here with us. All his life, Rav Benny taught. He learned and he taught. He taught everyone. He taught the great and the small. He was a Torah teacher in Machon Meir and in the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva high school. He taught Hebrew speakers and English speakers, yeshiva students and students of pre-military yeshiva academies.

Yet he never spoke a "canned" truth that he heard from others or that he read from others. Rather, his teachings came from within him, from the truth within him, from the divine truth abiding inside him, in his heart, his mind and his entire personality.

A Torah scroll could be placed beside him and we could say, "A learned what is written in B. A fulfilled what is written in B. He fulfilled its mitzvot. He fulfilled its mitzvot through his intent prayers, his sterling character, his seriousness and his happiness.

He fulfilled its mitzvot with all his heart and soul and might.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of the living, with all the righteous.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Text Message Q&A

[Summary of a talk delivered by Ha-Rav Aviner at Heichal Shlomo in Jerusalem during a conference on “Halachic Responsa on the Internet and in Electronic Media”]

Question: When one answers text message responsa, isn't there a danger of cheapening Halachah?

Answer: This question was already asked regarding one of the greatest Rabbis of the Nation: The Rambam. The Rambam wrote the laws in the Mishneh Torah and did not explain how he arrived at each and every halachah. Where are the sources? How can one analyze the halachah without sources? This is the difficulty raised by the Ra'avad. The Kesef Mishneh explains the Rambam's rationale is that not everyone possesses the ability to check the sources himself, and that his book was geared towards "Balebatim – laymen" (see introduction of the Kesef Mishneh to the Mishneh Torah).

Later on, there was a further “deterioration”: The Shulchan Aruch. The Shulchan Aruch is a book even shorter than the Mishneh Torah, and also does not contain sources. The Rama criticized the Shulchan Aruch: Where are the Ashkenazic rulings? Are there only Sefardim in the world?

And there were others who criticized the Shulchan Aruch: The Maharal in his book Netivot Olam expresses shock as to how someone could make a ruling based on the Shulchan Aruch. The Meharsha (Chidushei Agadot on Sotah 22a) writes: "In these generations, those who rule from the Shulchan Aruch without knowing the reasoning and Talmudic basis... are among those who destroy the world, and should be scolded." But the Pitchei Teshuvah (Yoreh Deah 242:8) explains that it is possible that this was true during the time of the Meharsha, since there were still no commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch, but now that there is the Taz, Shach, Magen Avraham and the rest of the Acharonim, and each law has been fully elucidated, it is proper to rule from the Shulchan Aruch and Acharonim on it.

There has been and always will be questions and difficulties raised about short answers and brief rulings.

We see that although there is a decline in the quality of the Q&A, there is a great increase in the quantity. There are people who want a "yes-or-no" answer. If someone is interested in a more extensive answer, I have four volumes of responsa. It is possible to receive answers in various ways: Fax, telephone, our radio program, letter and text message.

There is a joke: A person texts a Rabbi: I have a big problem. Is there a G-d? The answer: Yes. The sender replies: Thank you so much, Rabbi. You helped me greatly.

I do not force anyone to send questions by text message or to read the text message responsa. But there are people who want it. There are people in situations in which it is impossible to ask at length. For example, Army Q&A. A soldier cannot come to the Yeshiva whenever he desires. Similarly, when someone is on a trip. Further, there are many people who do not have a personal relationship with a particular Rabbi.

The Pele Yoetz writes (Erech Asufah) that one should not belittle those who gather halachic rulings since they benefit the community. You are not required to read those books, but do not mock them, since these books are of great aid to the community at large.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

Love – Air for the Soul

Love is not a prize. Love is air for the soul. Depriving a child of love is similar to a scuba driver threatening to close his son's oxygen tank. If we threaten a child, he will begin to fear that he will not be loved and will be closed in his room.

We have yet to see a child destroyed by excessive love. Perhaps he was destroyed on account of the lack of proper treatment due to love. Perhaps he was not educated correctly, or punished when he need to be. A child is not destroyed by excessive love. And even when he is punished, he must know that he is loved – unconditionally!

Always remember: A child does not know how to distinguish when his mother is angry with him or when she is angry about something else. If his mother returns home with an upset face because she received guff at work, he is certain that it is his fault. This is true until the age of 10 – everything that happens in the world revolves around him. It is an egocentric period. Egocentrism is not egotism. Egocentric means that he thinks that he is the center of the world. A dog barks in the street – he is sure that it was at him. One parent yells at another – it is at him. Everything is to him and about him. A parent must always remember this, and be sensitive to it.

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