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Vayera | The Power of Kindness and Hospitality





MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly parasha by Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel zt"l

From the weekly lectures of his son, Rabbi Israel Abargel shlita

פרשת וירא | אנגלית

... PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL

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- 500 Frank W Burr Blvd Suite 47 Teaneck, NJ 07666
- en@h-l.org.il
- www.hameir-laarets.org.il/en
- 💽 HaKatzir 666, Netivot, Israel
- (954) 800-6526
- HameirLaaretsEN
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Parshat Vayera - Not for Sale



Not for Sale

The following story was shared by Rabbi Mordechai Gerlitz:

Rabbi Naftali Hirsh, a Torah scholar and a deeply G-d-fearing man, was responsible for the eruv under the rabbinical court of Rabbi Yaakov Orenstein, the chief rabbi of Lemberg. Every week on Thursday, he would take a walk around the city, inspecting the eruv to ensure that no threads were damaged, and would repair them if needed. During the rest of the week, he sat in the Beit Midrash studying Torah, the joy of his life and his sole occupation.

Aside for the modest income he received from the community treasury as his fee for inspecting the eruv, he had no other source of income. In his home, there was barely enough to get by, and his family had to make do with very little. Fortunately, he had a truly virtuous wife who valued his piety above all else and tried to

help as much as she could, given their difficult financial situation. However, even her most valiant efforts were not enough to raise them out of poverty.

Moreover, it was time to marry off his daughters, and there was no prospect of a dowry anywhere in sight. His eldest daughter was of eligible age and was awaiting to be married off, soon followed by the second, and a year later, by the third daughter. Then came the fourth daughter of age – all of them waiting to start their own families.

At that time, the "candle tax" was still in effect, which required Jews to pay a substantial sum to the government for each candle they lit in honor of the Sabbath and holidays. This was no trivial amount; it was quite a burdensome toll when combined with other

taxes.

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Jews, being a righteous people, have a long-standing custom of lighting a large number of candles, not merely the minimum two candles but also additional ones. Some light as is the number of their children, some as the number of the days of the week, some based on a number of verses, and some based on the random number of candles found in the house.

Since the Jews were reluctant to give away all their savings to the authorities, their livelihood as it was being none too bright - would often report one or two candles, and nothing more.

When the authorities found out about this, they decided to put an end to what they saw as brazen Jewish deception. But how could they determine how many candles the Jews were actually lighting? They decided to appoint tax collectors from among their own ranks, individuals who were part of the Jewish community and could catch all the "offenders."

These tax collectors, being interested parties, mercilessly exploited their fellow Jews, and

anyone who tried to evade the tax was reported to the authorities.

Naturally, the rabbis were none too pleased with these tax collectors and reprimanded them repeatedly. However, most of these tax collectors were not upstanding individuals and threatened that if the rabbis continued to interfere, they would be promptly reported to the authorities.

overseeing these tax collectors, was an inspector appointed by the authorities, who lived in the city of Lemberg. Despite being of Jewish origin, he behaved most heartlessly, and surpassed all others in his cruelty. He distanced himself from his own people and their customs, and even refused to enter the synagogue on Yom Kippur. The Jews regarded him as an outcast and avoided any contact with him.

One Thursday in Lemberg, as Rabbi Naftali Hirsh was inspecting the city's eruv as usual, he heard someone calling his name from behind. When he turned around, to his surprise, he saw none other than the chief

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inspector, standing on the balcony of his mansion and gesturing for Rabbi Naftali to come up.

Pale and with unsteady steps, he climbed the luxurious staircase leading to the inspector's house. If he could, he would have run far away from this scoundrel. But what could he do? The inspector had summoned him.

As he ascended the stairs, Rabbi Naftali recited various psalms and Torah verses. His heart pounded with mightily, threatening to leap out of his chest. Who could know what this villain had in store for him?

To his great surprise, the inspector welcomed him warmly and offered him a comfortable chair.

"Listen, honorable Jew," he said with respect. "I have been observing you from my balcony every Thursday for a long time now. It is clear that you inspect the eruv with great G-d-fearing devotion, and undoubtedly, your reward for this in the world to come will be great. Therefore, I'd like to make you an offer: I know that you have four grown daughters who

need to get married, and you, their father, are a destitute, a pauper like you has nothing to give. The years are passing, and your daughters are not getting any younger... Sell me the merit of your mitzvah of eruv, and in return, I am willing to give you a fortune of gold coins that will be enough for dowries, wedding expenses, and much more for two of your daughters."

Rabbi Naftali sat with his mouth wide open, astonished by what he had heard. Could it be possible that this villain, out of nowhere, suddenly began to value and understand the significance of the commandments?

Seeing Rabbi Naftali's amazement and confusion, the inspector added, "I do not require an immediate answer from you. It is quite reasonable that you will want to take time to think about it. Go back home for now, and next week, when you pass my house again, come up and we will discuss it again. I very much hope to hear a positive answer from you."

As he exited the inspector's home, Rabbi Naftali felt that he

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was on the verge of fainting. Several times he wiped his forehead with his hand, struggling to believe that this was not a dream.

"Why would that scoundrel want to buy a mitzvah?" Rabbi Naftali wondered. "Can one even sell mitzvot, especially a mitzvah into which so much effort was invested every week?

On the other hand, giving a daughter in marriage was also a great mitzvah, and who knew which mitzvah was more important? Besides, the sages said that a person should be willing to sell everything they have to marry off their daughter to a Torah scholar. And what did he have to sell aside for mitzvot?

Rabbi Naftali began to fear that the inspector might change his mind and renege on his offer to provide the wedding expenses of his daughters. He at moments regretted not immediately agreeing to the inspector's proposal.

A dense fog clouded Rabbi Naftali's vision, and his mind was equally clouded. He didn't even pay attention to where his feet were taking him. These conflicting thoughts raced through his head, denying him peace of mind. When he realized he couldn't find the answer on his own, he decided to present the question to the city's rabbi, Rabbi Yaakov Orenstein, which he did without delay.

Upon hearing the question, Rabbi Yaakov contemplated. "The answer to the question of selling to the inspector your mitzvah of eruv requires careful consideration," Rabbi Yaakov said. "Come to me next Thursday before you go on your eruv inspection, and with G-d's help, I will be able to provide you with an answer."

The promise of the rabbi to address his question reassured Rabbi Naftali's troubled soul. Now he knew that the answer to his question was in capable hands.

Rabbi Yaakov spent the entire week pondering what to tell Rabbi Naftali until the next Thursday when Rabbi Naftali knocked on his door.

"**Listen** carefully, and try to understand what I am about to

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tell you," Rabbi Yaakov said in a mysterious tone.

"You know that the only true and ultimate reality is the existence of the Creator, filling all worlds, both spiritual and material. Everything that exists, has existed, and will exist has its existence only from the energy it receives from the source of Supreme Holiness. If this source stops sustaining anyone or anything, they instantly cease to exist.

"Evildoers as well, draw their life force from the sparks of light they extract from their holy source. Sometimes a good deed performed by a sinner can give them the energy to live for many years, yet they continue to sin, unaware that their days are numbered.

"Similarly, the chief inspector, has become so mired in sin that he has severed his soul from the source of holiness, thereby losing the energy to continue living. Therefore, he desires to acquire a mitzvah in order to extract holiness from it and prolong his existence. He doesn't know of it himself, but

he yearns for spiritual energy from his source.

"Beware, dear Rabbi Naftali, and do not allow this villain to grab hold of your commandments. Do not listen to him or let the glitter of gold blind you. By selling him your mitzvah thus reconnecting him with his source of life, you will enable him to continue to sin and oppress his brethren.

As a sign that everything I've told you is true, note that at the moment you will refuse his request, he will cease to exist."

Overwhelmed yet relieved to have the right answer for the inspector, Rabbi Naftali left Rabbi Yaakov's presence, turning toward his usual route. Approaching the inspector's mansion, he saw the inspector impatiently waiting outside.

As soon as the inspector saw Rabbi Naftali, he rushed toward him and asked, "So, have you finally decided to sell me your mitzvah of eruv?"

"**No,**" Rabbi Naftali replied firmly, almost shouting.

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However, the inspector did not give up easily. In a desperate attempt to persuade Rabbi Naftali, he kept increasing the price he was willing to pay for his mitzvah until he promised to cover all the wedding expenses for all four daughters.

But it was all in vain. Rabbi Naftali stood his ground like a rock, fulfilling Rabbi Yaakov's command.

Seeing that Rabbi Naftali stubbornly refused, and was not willing to budge, the inspector

turned around with an unhappy expression and strode back home. However, before reaching his home, his legs gave way, and he fell, lifeless in the middle of the street...

"A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found." (Psalms 37:10).

Like all other stories, this story too comes to an end. However, the lessons learned from it should awaken us...

Now, let us begin with two questions on our weekly Parsha:

Did G-d say anything?

In the four Torah portions where we learn about our forefather Avraham, we find three times that G-d appeared to him:

1. The first time, when G-d revealed Himself to Avraham and declared that the land of Israel belongs exclusively to the people of Israel: "The L-rd appeared

to Avram and said, 'To your offspring, I will give this land.'''¹ (Bereshit 12:7).

2. The second time, G-d commanded Avram regarding circumcision, saying: "I am G-d Al-mighty; walk before me, and be whole... This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me

1. Avraham divided his wealth during his lifetime, as stated "And to the children of the concubines, Avraham

gave gifts and sent them away from his son Yitzchak during his lifetime..." (Genesis 25:6) Parshat Vayera - This, of all Things?

and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised." (Bereshit 17:1, 10).

3. The third time, in the opening of our current Torah portion, it states: "The L-rd appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the

entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." (Bereshit 18:1).

However, it doesn't relate that G-d conveyed something to Avraham. What was the meaning of this revelation, did G-d say anything to Avraham?

One additional question:

This, of all Things?

Our Parsha begins with a tale of Avraham's hospitality.

The Chofetz Chaim writes in 'Ahavat Chesed': "Avraham fulfilled the entire Torah, as the Torah itself testifies about him: "Because Avraham obeyed My voice and fulfilled My duty, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Bereshit 26:5). Nevertheless, the Torah does not tell us about this in detail.

However, the Torah does provide a detailed account of how Avraham fulfilled the

commandment of hospitality: despite being weak after his circumcision, Avraham sat at the entrance of his tent in the unbearable heat, hoping for guests to arrive. When he saw three travelers, he ran to them, inviting them to come in and rest, offering them food and water to wash their feet, in the most hospitable way imaginable.

We need to understand: Why, of all the many commandments fulfilled by Avraham, does the Torah provide such a detailed account of the particular commandment of hospitality?

The Ohr Hachayim asks: 'why wasn't Yishmael mentioned in the verse in the division of Avraham's assets?'

He answers that since Yishmael was

the son of the maidservant, he was therefore Yitzchak's servant as well, and the law states that whatever belongs to the servant belongs to his master. Parshat Vayera - This, of all Things?

Why does the Torah mention 'the way of the L-rd' that Avraham teaches his descendants - "For I know him, that he will command his children... to keep the way of the

L-rd." (Bereshit 18:19) - shortly after and in connection to the description of Avraham's hospitality?²

To answer these questions, let's start from the beginning...

2. "The simple answer to this, is that by this account the torah emphasizes the power of 'personal example' that Avraham taught his descendants. Children often imitate their parents.

In this regard, the Rabbi Yochanan David Solomon wrote (Ein Yehudit, p. 151):

"The man sitting across from me in the waiting room caught my attention. I tried to guess his profession: a teacher? A psychologist? Maybe a veterinarian? I struck up a conversation with him, and one of my first questions was, of course: 'What is your profession?' His answer surprised me: 'I train dogs.' I asked him, 'Why is there a need for this profession, is it necessary to teach a dog to bark when a thief comes?' He smiled for a moment and began to explain:

'Let's say,' he said, 'I give you a young, energetic puppy as a gift. You must teach him reward and punishment so that he knows right from wrong. But how do you ensure that the dog knows precisely what he is receiving the punishment for? The message you transmit to the dog may not be as clear as you might think, and without professional guidance, your punishment may teach the dog something completely

different than you intended. When you relay a message, one must think about how it will be received by the other and how they will understand and interpret it.'

"As I sat in a corner of the waiting room, contemplating what was just shared with me episodes from my own childhood and education flashed through my mind. I recalled of a strict teacher who forced us to contribute to his blue charity box every Friday. Some of the children were poor, and some forgot to ask for money at home, only a few students willingly contributed to the charity box. And so the teacher developed deceitful and cunning ways to squeeze the meager amounts of money that the children had brought to school with which to buy themselves a treat during the break.

"This 'education' to charity remained etched in my mind as a terrible memory. Perhaps other children received from this a practical lesson in how to extort, how to be cruel, and how to use invalid methods for a positive purpose. but I still carry it with me in my memory as a horrifying nightmare.

"**We'd** be wise to learn from the father of our nation, Avraham. To demonstrate

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Parshat Vayera - The Spark of Goodness in All Creations

The Spark of Goodness in All Creations

Everything created in the world, from the most spiritual beings in the highest realms to the lowest entities in our physical world, exists by virtue of the spark of divine light that sustains it.³ In the words of Rabbi Steinzaltz Even-Israel:

"Every creation derives its sustenance directly or indirectly from the holiness of the Creator. The Creator is the foundation of

all reality, and there is no reality that is not nourished by Him."⁴

Our sages teach that the Al-mighty created two systems: one of good and one of evil.⁵ Human beings stand in the middle, with the task of choosing good.

Both the forces of good and evil receive their vitality from the Creator. However, there is a distinction:

to his son Yishmael hospitality, he didn't suffice with instructions, while he gave Yishmael the bulls to prepare, he continued on with bringing the butter and servicing his guests heartily.

"The transmission of a message of love for Torah cannot be served when it is enveloped in enmity or coarseness. Similarly, the demand from children to respect their teachers is futile when exposed to many derogatory remarks regarding teachers and their worth. Parents may utter disrespectful remarks about teachers in front of their children, yet expect that their son will heed their warning to respect their teachers...

3. fo sdrow eht nI Ohr HaChaim (Numbers 14:9): And our Sages of blessed memory also said that every created being contains

a spark of holiness, even the non-pure creatures, the wicked individuals, and even the the evil inclination (Satan). There is nothing that does not possess vitality, which is an aspect of G-dliness, without which, nothing could exist. And when the vital spark is separated, the entire structure is nullified and destroyed.

- **4.** Biur Tanya (p. 145, 212)
- **5. Rabbi** Adin Even Yisrael, writes the following (ibid):

"We often refer to the evil side as 'klipot,' or 'shells', since the holiness of G-d is limited by four 'shells' (klipot). This is referred to in the four descriptions in the vision of Ezekiel: 'And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire flaring up, and a brightness was around it' (Ezekiel 1:4)...

Parshat Vayera - The Holiness of the First Human

Holy entities draw their vitality directly from Holiness, since they seek closeness to the Creator and nullify themselves before Him. On the other hand, unholy entities draw vitality indirectly and 'reluctantly'.

During creation, the Creator only allocated a negligible portion of vitality to the impure side, and it was nearly powerless.⁶

After establishing these two systems were, G-d created the human being.

The Holiness of the First Human

On the sixth day of creation, the Human being was formed from the dust of the earth. Being a direct creation of the Creator, he was elevated and holy to the extent that his heels radiated more intensely than the sun.

The forces of impurity, witnessing this greatness, desired to extract this holiness for themselves and thereby gain more power,⁷ and the serpent launched its attack...

Much has been written about the sin of the tree of knowledge

The lowest shells are the three impure klipot, while the fourth is the finer klipah (shell) that contains some light"...

6. "At the time of creation, the distinction between good and evil was clear and recognizable. The 'good' was situated high above and far away from the evil, and between them was a great distance and the divine light that reached the husks (klipot) was very minimal. Only a small spark of holiness clothed itself within the husks, and enlivened them all. And since it was only a small spark that enlivened the evil, they had minimal power, and they yielded to the forces of holiness."

- **7. The** Rebbe Rashab wrote the following (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5679, page 159):
- "Although Man was at the pinnacle of perfection at creation, nonetheless in the world there existed the reality of 'klipot' (impure 'shells') due to the 'shattering of the vessels' and the 'diminishment of the moon' that needed to be rectified by Man however lowly they were situated.

"Therefore, even though Man's body was created by the Holy One Blessed Be He Himself, nonetheless, he was situated at a level where the 'klipot' could have a hold of him..."

Parshat Vayera - The Forces of Evil Cry out: Hand yourselves over

and many esoteric explanations have been written on the subject, as it is a profound and requires much effort to fully comprehend.

Nevertheless, ultimately, Adam sinned, and the forces of impurity gained control over Adam and Eve, extracting their holiness and obtaining tremendous power.

The Forces of Evil Cry out: Hand yourselves over

As mentioned earlier, within human beings exists a divine soul enclothed in the physical body with an animal soul, each of the two vying for control. The Al-mighty granted human beings the power, through their free will, to liberate the sparks of holiness that are ensnared within the physical world and return them to their source.

On the other hand, if a person chooses, G-d forbid, to transgress the will of the Creator, he transfers the sparks of holiness within him to 'the other side', feeding the 'kelipot'. They, in turn, after gaining access, attempt to lure him

to additional sins, thus acting like parasites, exploiting all the holy energy of their 'host' causing them to eventually perish. Eventually they make a person waste away – spiritually speaking – thereby disconnecting the person from their life-force which is the very energy that the 'kelipot' need in order to keep alive.

Without the person, the 'the other side' does not have much significance or importance. Its purpose and aim are to make a person stumble, and thereby derive spiritual energy from that person.⁸

8. During those days, many Jews earned their livelihood from running inns and taverns. In almost every town in Russia there were Jews engaged in such a business, and they earned a respectable living from it. Then one day, the oppressive Czar of Russia decided to expel

the Jews from all the villages and relocate them to the larger cities. Following this terrible decree, thousands of Jews were left destitute, without any means of support.

The heart of the revered Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of Tanya, trembled with sorrow upon hearing this

Parshat Vayera - The Forces of Evil Cry out: Hand yourselves over

news. He embarked on a journey throughout the country to collect money to aid the impoverished families and to offer bribes to the officials to alleviate the decree. During his travels, Rabbi Shneur Zalman arrived in the region of Volhynia, near the town of Tulchin.

Since Tulchin was the residence of Rabbi Baruch, the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov. Rabbi Shneur Zalman set out to visit him. Rabbi Baruch received him with great honor and inquired about the purpose of his visit in his territory. Rabbi Shneur Zalman replied, "Firstly, it states "To the L-rd is the land and all therein" (Psalms 24:1). Secondly, I cannot bear the suffering of the poor Jews who were expelled from their homes. I am collecting money that will serve as bribes to mitigate the decree "

Rabbi Baruch asked him, "Could not the judgments be sweetened by placing one's hand on the forehead? Why do you need money?" Rabbi Shneur Zalman replied, "Jacob our patriarch could certainly have sweetened the judgments by placing his hand on his forehead, yet he stated, 'I will appease Esav's face' (Genesis 32:21). Similarly, I will not rely on sweetening the judgments by placing my hand on my forehead."

Rabbi Baruch inquired further, "Could vou not teach them the 'Oneness of G-d of your grandfather the Baal Shem Toy, and thus naturally sweeten the judgments against the Jewish people?" Rabbi Shneur Zalman paused for a moment and

then replied, "Actually, it was due to the 'Oneness of G-d taught by your grandfather the Baal Shem Tov that the decree was issued in the first place.

I will tell you a story: After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, no nation or kingdom wanted to accept them. The reason for this was that the heavenly ministers of the nations above did not want to accept them either. They said, 'When the Jews settle in any land, the first thing they do is build study halls and synagogues. They study, pray, and recite the Shema. saying 'G-d is One,' thereby nullifying our existence, as darkness is nullified before the light of holiness. Therefore, we will not accept them in any land.'

Only the Polish minister agreed to accept them, saying, 'I am not afraid of them; on the contrary, I will derive benefit from them. When I accept them, they will trade, engage in injustice and fraud, and cause harm to one another. When they will pray and study Torah they will do so without intention and not for G-d's sake, and we will derive much spiritual energy from these misdeeds, and so, in the end, he agreed to accept them "

However, now that the Jewish people started praying and studying Torah properly thanks to your grandfather the Baal Shem Tov, the spiritual minister and the King of Poland desires to expel the Jews from their midst.

(Shmuot u'Sipurim Part 2, Page 38)

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Parshat Vayera - The Power of Evil over Good

The greater the holiness, the greater the strength that the 'the other side' deploys to capture that holiness, as our sages declared: 'The greater the person, the greater their evil inclination.'

In the context of history, numerous outstanding and devout Jews fell under the influence of the Haskalah Movement. Regrettably, the outcome was consistently greatly unfavorable. In most cases, they ended up obscure and unidentifiable individuals. grappling with confusion controversy, and the harm they brought upon themselves outweighed the great damage they inflicted upon their Jewish community.

Put simply, the evil force is self-destructive and parasitic. It compels individuals to sacrifice their spiritual well-being for the evil forces' momentary gain, yet ultimately, their victim's spiritual vitality diminishes and dries up, leaving the evil force devoid of a source of sustenance and life.

Now, let's return to discuss the Garden of Eden.

The Power of Evil over Good

The holiness of Adam was immense, and thus, the exploitation of his holiness by the 'kelipot' was extensive. Evil thus infiltrated every sphere of reality.⁹

As a result of their sin, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden and settled in the world familiar to us today. Here, they bore children, and the blessing 'be fruitful and multiply'

9. After the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, a new reality was born in the world. In every part of creation, the negative element entered and mingled, and from then on, the work of purification to separate between good and evil began. As Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote in his book "Sha'arei Kedusha":

"Know that after Adam sinned and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, his soul and body each became connected to both good and evil. This is the concept of the impurity that the serpent injected into Eve and Adam, and through the evil and impurity that it injected into

Parshat Vayera - The Power of Evil over Good

was fulfilled, the entire world filling with their descendants.

The 'kelipot' continued to seek opportunities to extract holiness from humans

The Shem MiShmuel writes: 10 'Know that the Al-mighty did not create a person before creating a specific channel of life and sustenance for them.

'The forces of impurity, knowing this, seeks all possible ways to attach themselves to this channel. They know that the most successful way to do this is to impair his holiness. If they can push a person to defile their eves with forbidden sights, he has already fallen into their trap, and they can exploit everything Heaven intended for him through his channel.'

them, it caused illnesses and afflictions to them and brought death to their souls and bodies. This is what is written, "For on the day you eat from it, you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17), meaning the death of the soul and the death of the body...

Now, when the first man sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, this mixture was introduced into all the worlds, and there is nothing that does not contain both good and evil "

10. In his words:

"In the conclusion of the tractate Kiddushin (82a), it is stated: "And I was created to serve my Maker, is it not right that I should live a life of ease? Rather, I have corrupted my deeds and diminished my sustenance."

From here it is implied that each person's livelihood is created together with them. This is further emphasized in the words of our Sages, may their memory be a blessing (Pesachim 53b): "A person does not know from what he earns," implying that his sustenance is guaranteed, merely one does not know what it is.

"I have committed evil deeds" refers to the known sin of tainting the covenant, as it is written regarding Er and Onan's immodest deeds: "And Er the firstborn of Judah was evil". thus implying that the punishment for this known sin is the diminishment of sustenance.

Similarly, every blemish in the covenant reduces one's sustenance, as it is written: "For by means of a loose woman, a man is reduced to a crust of bread" (Proverbs 6:26).

This diminished sustenance is by means of the spiritual forces of evil tearing and snatching away one's livelihood...

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Parshat Vavera - The Power of Evil over Good

During the generation of the flood, the forces of evil began to work in this direction. As the Torah says: 'And it came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them. The sons of the mighty saw that the daughters of men were fair, and they took them as wives.' And so, for twenty generations, the forces of evil drained all the goodness from above intended for mankind.11

11. In a conversation of the esteemed Kabbalist Rabbi Yaakov Edelstein he said as follows:

Every Jewish man and woman must know that as long as they live in this world, they are in the midst of a struggle with the forces of impurity. Like any struggle, at times they may stumble, and at times they may lose. However, ultimately, the one who emerges victorious is the one who manages to endure the entire battle.

The Holy One, blessed be He, created us according to His will, and He takes pride in us with every good intention. In all our attempts to encourage ourselves and maintain a stance of holiness, we receive divine assistance. More than that, through all the struggles we wage against the forces of impurity (even if we occasionally falter), we ultimately merit great abundance!

Therefore, one must never despair. It is forbidden to surrender. We must continue to fight with all our might. And if these words sound somewhat peculiar, we can turn to the portion of Vayishlach, where we can learn:

From the very moment of his birth, our patriarch Jacob dwelled in the tents of Torah and diligently engaged in study. By the time he reached the age of 63, his devotion and strength in Torah had intensified remarkably. For a continuous period of 14 years (until he reached the age of 77), he did not spend even one moment idle; his time was wholly devoted to the study of Torah.

Afterward, for a span of continuous years, he served his Creator with all his might and merit to draw down the holy souls of the holy tribes. Then, at the age of 97, Jacob our patriarch decided to leave Laban's house and return to the land of Israel.

On his way there, there were several moments when he remained alone in an open area without any of his close associates around him The evil inclination, Satan himself, eagerly awaited this opportunity, thinking, "Now I can certainly taint his holiness!" He descended and attempted to attack Jacob's thoughts and heart with impure temptations. The battle was fierce and enduring, lasting

throughout an entire night!

Parshat Vayera - The Power of the Attribute of Chesed

Since the Creator did not want impure forces to continue feeding on holiness, He 'dimmed' His light, and divinity was concealed from the people, as

it is written, 'He turned back His right hand because of the enemy.'

This continued until our forefather Avraham appeared...

The Power of the Attribute of Chesed

Throughout his life, Avraham purified himself by serving the Creator, one purification after another, until he reached the level of absolute holiness and purity, at which point the forces of evil could no longer 'exploit' the sparks of holiness from him

However, Avraham, filled with love for the Creator, desired to spread goodness around him to G-d's creations as well, 12 and draw down a divine light that the 'kelipot' would not be able to attach themselves to.

During this battle, he managed to inflict some impurity upon Jacob, causing a slight blemish in the sinew of the thigh. Yet Jacob our patriarch did not despair, and he continued to fight with all his might, by all means of combat, with sword, bow, spear, and stones.

In the end, Jacob our patriarch emerged victorious! In the very place where the Satan had hoped to draw holiness from Jacob, Jacob managed to draw strength from Satan himself. In Satan, there were 359 lights, corresponding to the numerical value of his name, Shin-Tet-Nun (359). Jacob succeeded in drawing from him all the lights of Shin-Tet-Nun. Thus, his name was changed from Jacob to Israel, for if we combine the letters of Jacob (numerically

182) with the letters of Satan (359), it adds up to the name Israel (541) in Gematria.

Thus, when he faced this trial he reached a level that he didn't reach in all the years Jacob our patriarch studied Torah and engaged in drawing down holy souls.

12. The following is excerpted from our series on the Shulchan Aruch (the Code of Jewish Law):

The third commandment (of the 613 commandments) is the commandment to "love Hashem (the Lord)." This commandment has several components.

From the general commandment to love Hashem, our sages instructed that a

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Parshat Vayera - The Power of the Attribute of Chesed

It turns out that the way to do this is through kindness (chesed).

As written in the book 'Netiv Mitzvotecha': "Know that every descent of blessing goes through transformations during its descent from heaven, and the 'kelipot'

have an opportunity to grasp it. However, kindness (chesed), which is the primordial light that shines from one end of the world to the other, without coarsening or weakening, blinds the 'kelipot', and they cannot

person should awaken the hearts of all creatures to love the revered G-d. This means that it is not enough for a person to love Hashem with all their heart; rather, one must also awaken the hearts of all the other creatures to love Hashem.

Thus, our sages of blessed memory wrote (Sifrei, Va'etchanan 32), "And you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your might." (Deuteronomy 6:5) – love Him to the extent that Abraham, our father, loved Him. As it is written about Abraham, "And the souls they made in Charan" (Genesis 12:5).

Due to the greatness of his great comprehension and the intensity of his love for Hashem, he drew people closer to faith. So too, you should love Hashem to the extent that you will seek to draw people closer to Him.

Abraham, our father, loved Hashem with all of his soul and might and, therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, called him "My lover," as it is written,

"Abraham, My lover" (Isaiah 41:8).

All the more so, it is incumbent upon a person to instill the love of Hashem in the hearts of their spouse, children, and relatives until this love is continually in their hearts. They too will be enraptured with this love continually. Through this, His divinity will be spread and strengthened in the world.

Abraham, our father, through meals, drinks, and other forms of hospitality. caused and brought together countless thousands and myriads of people. Through this, he united their hearts and informed them of the divinity of Hashem within them. Consequently, many thousands of people from the nations of the world drew closer to Hashem, and an enormous unity was created in the higher and lower realms

By virtue of what did Abraham perform all this? Because he cleaved to the attribute of kindness, and therefore he was bestowed with the name "Abraham, the man of kindness"...

Parshat Vayera - Hospitality - the Essence of Light

use this light. Therefore, we too, must strive to awaken kindness..."

Thus, Avraham took up the cause of doing kindness¹³ and hospitality in particular.

Hospitality – the Essence of Light

Avraham understood the importance of Chesed and that through it, one can draw down the divine light without giving the 'kelipot' a possibility to leach from it.

Upon further reflection Avraham discovered that the primary drawing of this divine light of kindness is through hospitality.

Rabbi Hillel of Paritch writes: 'The Gemara says that hosting guests is greater than receiving the Shechinah, as stated: "My Lords, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not bypass your servant," which is interpreted that Avraham thus told the Shechinah (L-rd) that appeared to him to wait until he finished tending to his guests.

'When a person receives the Shechinah, he attains the limited 'detailed light,' which is appropriated to each person according to their standing.

'However, through hospitality, one attains the more 'general light,' the higher infinite light that shines from above equally upon everyone.

'This is what Avraham said, "'Adonai' (detailed and limited divine light), please do not pass by your servant." By hosting guests, he attained the 'general encompassing light' (which stands at a higher level where the 'kelipot' cannot attach themselves to it)."

'This light brings faith and allows for one to more easily repent, and specifically through

13. As stated in Midrash Rabbi Tanchuma (Chayei Sarah, Chapter 2): "**Abraham** stood and cleaved to the attribute of kindness. The Holy One,

blessed be He, said to him: 'This attribute was Mine, and you have embraced it. I promise I will make you like Me.'''

Parshat Vayera - Journey to the Heights

fulfilling this commandment Avraham merited to bring the masses to follow in G-d's ways.'

Rabbi Nachman from Breslov similarly writes: 'One

who refrains from hosting guests strengthens the evil side and they don't turn in repentance.'

Before we continue, let us share a story...

Journey to the Heights

As mentioned before, the commandment of hospitality has the power to reveal G-dlines and divine light. In this context, the following story is recounted:

They were a respected couple in the kibbutz, each successful in their own fields. He ran a successful eastern medicinal clinic, and his wife led youth groups. Their lives were organized and busy.

After three years of intense work, they decided to leave the country and travel in search of a more peaceful life elsewhere. He closed his clinic, his wife disbanded her youth groups, and they informed the kibbutz of their departure. They packed the contents their apartment, stored them in a warehouse, and bought flight tickets. The kibbutz bid them farewell with sadness, and their apartment was assigned to a new family.

Two days before their flight, the wife discovered that she was pregnant. The couple decided that due to this development, this wasn't the right time to travel abroad and canceled their flight. They were now left without a home and without sources of income.

What could they do, and where could they spend the night? They recalled their friends from Lotem with whom they had maintained occasional contact. They called and hesitatingly inquired about a place to stay, and were immediately invited warmly.

The journey on the narrow, winding road through the mountains was accompanied by a heavy feeling of loneliness, they were alone in world bereft of all their worldly possessions. In the middle of the silence of the nightly ride, a yellow

Parshat Vayera - Journey to the Heights

gate covered in wildflowers signaled their arrival in Lotem.

Lotem, a mystical paradise, allowed one to breathe spirituality even before crossing its open gate. Guitars were scattered in the doorways of the open houses. In Lotem, spirituality was the going currency, there was nothing to steal; serenity was the settlement's trademark.

The spirit of the townlet of Lotem in the northern galilee, was inspired by the eastern lifestyle, and this spirit spread from there to the rest of the country as well. Many of these spiritual seekers had found tranquility and happiness as part of the Teshuva movement. Searching oneself and finding spirituality in Judaism have become an inseparable pair.

The real transformation in Lotem began about five years ago. An 'Arachim' Torah seminar for that took place in the settlement filled them with meaning and purpose. Groups of Torah study formed and home gathering were created and expanded. The group of returnees to Judaism even began

to humorously call themselves 'Chassidut Lotem.' An old dining room no longer in use was allocated as the new synagogue, and thus the 'Ahavat Chinam Synagogue' was established on a hill in the townlet.

On the first Yom Kippur since its founding, the local worshippers were surprised to find themselves formed into a congregation of more than a hundred participants, a remarkable number for such a small and isolated place.

The above-mentioned couple too received this warmth, and they experienced an uplifting Shabbat. Profound discussions into the night, soulful conversations, and the joy of Shabbat burst out into soulful song. They weren't seeking Judaism, but the townlet of Lotem found favor in their eyes. They rented an unoccupied house and began renovating it, and the husband worked to rebuild his clinic.

Only a short time had passed and before they could even settle down, a stirring event occurred. One morning at dawn, a panicked neighbor burst into their home,

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Parshat Vayera - Some Notes on Hospitality

cradling a baby in her arms, gasping loudly among her sobs "save him."

The child was in high fever, delirious. At first, his parents thought he was trembling from a nightmare, but by dawn, they found him unconscious, pale, and on the brink of death. Lotem lacked a doctor, and he was an eastern healer after all.

What could be do?

He instructed her to lay the baby on the sofa. The child was limp, pulseless. He asked everyone to leave the room and leave alone with the baby. He had not the faintest idea what to do. Beyond the wall, cries and sobs could be heard.

He attempted resuscitation and heart massage, and continued tirelessly, yet with no results. Despair overcame his heart, and he raised his eyes and said with a heartfelt prayer, "G-d, please save him"

Suddenly, the baby opened its

eyes and started breathing again. "G-d, thank You!" he cried out.

The mother, ecstatic, broke into the room and ran to the boy, picked him up, hugged him, and danced. Finally, the ambulance arrived and the mother took her son to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with severe pneumonia.

The eastern healer's wife exclaimed "you saved the baby; you brought him back from the dead!". To which he replied, "no, it was not me, it was the hand of G-d". They looked at each other dumbfounded. A new factor had entered the lives of the couple from the kibbutz. Later that day, they went over to the home of one of the returnees to Judaism, seeking to learn more about G-d who had saved the baby...

Now, let's add a few more details on the laws of hospitality before we return to the questions we opened with.

Some Notes on Hospitality

Rabbi Yitzhak Yaakov Fuchs Writes:

The commandment of hospitality applies to both poor and wealthy

Parshat Vayera - Some Notes on Hospitality

guests, to adults and minors. However, when we host poor guests, in addition to the commandment of hospitality, we also fulfill the commandment of charity (tzedakah).

A person is considered a guest when they have nothing to eat and nowhere to stay overnight. This includes a person who has a home and food but find themselves in a different city where they lack these necessities. However, a person who lives in the same city and comes for a visit is not considered a guest.

In certain cases, people living in the same city and even neighbors can be considered 'guests.' For example, if they experience in their home an electrical problem or lose their keys, etc.

It is also essential to consider the countenance on our face when we host guests. We should greet guests with a joyful expression and make sure that they won't feel like a burden.

We should take care to provide good conditions for our guests: flavorful food, clean utensils, and inviting lodgings.

We should create a pleasant atmosphere, and refrain from discussing our own problems or other unpleasant matters. It goes without saying that we not mention in the guest's presence how much effort or money we have spent for their sake.

To conclude this segment, a pertinent quote from Rabbi Aaron of Belz:

"Our time differs from the past when people would host the sick, the mentally challenged and the poor in their homes, feeding and caring for them. Today, thank G-d, there are public dining facilities and places to sleep for these unfortunate souls, such that it is quite uncommon to find people who have nowhere to shelter.

"Additionally, the prevailing norms have changed, and unlike the custom in years' bygone, one is not expected to host people who have not bathed in a long time, or wear filthy rags or have become accustomed to live on the street.

"So how can we perform the commandment of hospitality today?

Parshat Vayera - Beware of Pitfalls

"The truth is, that there are many examples today of true hospitality. For example, to offer a ride to travelers waiting at the bus stop in the heat of the summer and the cold of winter, treating them kindly and warmly — is a complete fulfillment of the commandment

of hospitality today no less than in yesteryear."

Fortunate is one who performs such hospitality, and lucky is his lot.

While on the topic of practical guidelines, there's another important matter to address:

Beware of Pitfalls

Hospitality is the great commandment that draws down the 'primordial light' in a manner such that the 'kelipot' have no ability to leach from it. Therefore, it is clear that when we want to fulfill this commandment, we too must take care not attach 'kelipot' to it with our own hands.

To articulate:

My father, Rabbi Yoram once said:

When Bilam saw the camp of Israel, he exclaimed in admiration: "How goodly are your tents, Jacob, your dwellings, Israel." (Numbers 24:5)

Rashi comments on the verse: he saw that their tents' entrances

were not aligned opposite each other. Balaam saw that the Jews build their tents in such a way so as to prevent one from peering into their neighbor's private domain. This demonstrates decency and modesty, which greatly impressed Bilam.

From here we learn that a key to the success of building a home is to take care that no external factors should know, or let alone interfere with, what happens inside. The spouses must themselves tend to their affairs with caution and sensitivity, and only then can they

live in peace and harmony.

Additionally, it is improper for the doors of the house to be open wide to visits from friends and

Parshat Vayera - Avraham's Lofty Level

casual gatherings. All of this leads to a breach of the sanctity of the Jewish home, and unfortunately, many families have been destroyed because of such things.

This is hinted to by the threshold which is at every entrance to a home, slightly raised from the ground. It serves as a symbolic road sign: Stop. Entrance for authorized personnel only.

Our sages have already said: "Restrict the public from your home, and do not allow everyone in." (Yevamot 63b)

Especially when it comes to a young couple just starting to build their own family unit. Building a committed relationship

requires a lot of effort, and any visits from outsiders are entirely out of place. This disrupts the sanctity of the Jewish home.

In general, the commandment to host guests does not apply to young families. Aside from parents and perhaps very close relatives, they should not host guests at home.

Moreover, hospitality must not come at the expense of the spouse and children. There may at times not have the strength to receive guests, and if we are not considerate of them, it can create resentment in their hearts...

Now, finally, let's return to our two initial questions:

Avraham's Lofty Level

As previously understood, indeed, G-d did not relate any particular message to Avraham in the revelation opening our weekly Torah portion, He rather revealed to him the great G-dly light of hospitality.

The Torah shares with us that the L-rd appeared to Avraham in

the merit of his divine service of hospitality: He sat at the entrance of his tent awaiting guests, despite the unbearable heat, all on the third, most painful day following his circumcision, and at the very advanced age of 99.

Our forefather Avraham, due to his great diligence in hospitality

Parshat Vayera - Avraham's Lofty Level

was privileged to reach a level that no one before him had reached. He reached "פתח האוהל" - "the entrance to the tent" which refers to Malchut of Atzilut (where all the life force of creation emanates from).

This then was the purpose of the revelation, to show what Avraham achieved through his fervent dedication to fulfill the will of the Creator. Through this commandment of hospitality, he was able to draw down

the 'Supreme Light,' from which the 'kelipot' cannot leach. And driven by this great and impermeable light, Avraham converted masses of the nations to the divine unity.

Since Avraham was privileged to reveal this great divine light, he was guaranteed that his descendants would follow in his footsteps. The Jewish people are thus identified as "Israel ... the seed of Avraham who loved Me."

Shabbat Shalom!



Parshat Vayera - The Pathway

The Pathway

- 1. The 'kelipot' (impure powers) are able to receive from the various blessings of Heaven, except for those which are in from the attribute of kindness. Therefore, a person should strive to perform acts of lovingkindness, especially of generosity and hospitality.
- **2.** Hosting guests is a great commandment. It can be performed with both the poor and the wealthy, young and the old. When guests are additionally in need, one also fulfills the commandment of charity.
- **3.** When hosting guests, it is important not only what we offer them, but also how we offer it warmly with a smile and a happy countenance. We must do everything possible to make our guests feel comfortable.
- **4.** An important rule for the success in the home is to keep the personal affairs of the home private, not sharing or involving anyone from outside.

Additionally, the doors of the home must not be wide open for parties of different kinds. This can cause untold damage to the home and the marital union.

This is even more crucial with regards to a young couple laying the foundation of their home. Any unnecessary visitors to their house are entirely unwelcome, and even visits from family members and parents should be limited to the minimum.

- **5.** One must ensure that their hospitality does not come at the expense of their family members and children. This can cause them aggravation, and the benefit of the good deed is not worth the harm.
- **6.** Today, this mitzvah exists in all its gravity, yet there are more ways to perform it, for example, by offering a ride to a traveler in stormy weather or in the hot summer days. Hospitality done with a warm smile and generosity is a great way to fulfill this commandment.



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City	Lighting	Ends	Tam
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Miami	6:20pm	7:13pm	7:49pm
Los Angeles	5:41pm	6:36pm	7:10pm
Montreal	5:21pm	6:23pm	6:49pm
Toronto	5:48pm	6:49pm	7:17pm
London	4:12pm	5:21pm	5:41pm
Jerusalem	4:33 pm	5:22 pm	5:58 pm
Tel Aviv	4:29 pm	5:18 pm	5:53 pm
Haifa	4:27 pm	5:16 pm	5:51 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:30 pm	5:20 pm	5:55 pm

Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

"And Avraham rose early and saddled his donkey and took with him two of his assistants and his son Yitzchak" (Genesis 22:3). He took with him his assistants - including his son Yishmael, and only afterward did he take Yitzchak. Yishmael prepared for the journey thinking 'father favors me the most'.

This exemplifies how a wise and discerning parent bestows love upon all their children. This ensures that no child harbors thoughts like, "My parent doesn't genuinely love me, they only love my sibling."



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