

# THE LINE THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

*Mi Ka'Amcha Yisroel | Parshas Vayeira*

Imagine spending years building up a yeshiva. Sleepless nights. Raising money, finding teachers, persuading parents to entrust you with their children. Finally, the yeshiva is flourishing. Then one day you take out a map of Brooklyn, draw a line across it, and announce that boys on the other side of that line - even some who are already your talmidim - must go to another yeshiva. Why would anyone do such a thing?

Hold that question. Welcome to Mi Ka'Amcha Yisroel.

This week, Parshas Vayeira, brings us to one of the most dramatic moments in the entire Torah: the Akeidah. Hidden within this extraordinary test is a lesson about something every one of us struggles with: the difference between loving something good and loving the reason it exists.

Think about Avraham Avinu. What defined his life? *Chesed*. Kindness, compassion, giving constantly. His tent was open to strangers. Even while recovering from his bris milah, he sat outside in the burning heat, hoping to welcome guests.

And then came the Akeidah. Borei Olam commanded Avraham to bring his beloved son, Yitzchak, as an offering. Can you imagine what this meant for a man whose entire existence was built on compassion?

The *Meshech Chochmah*, on Bereishis 22:16-18, teaches something remarkable. Ordinarily, when a person acts with cruelty, it can change him. It can harden his heart. But Avraham was prepared to do something utterly contrary to his nature solely because Borei Olam commanded him. His willingness gave his descendants the strength to meet difficult obligations without acquiring a cruel nature.

Avraham did not become a harsh man. His heart remained the heart of Avraham Avinu: the Avraham who welcomed strangers, the Avraham who pleaded for the people of Sedom. His chesed was never an end in itself. It was always in the service of Borei Olam.

Even the most beautiful middah cannot become greater than the will of Borei Olam. The moment we forget that, even our virtues can lead us astray.

Consider a very different example. On May 28, 2016, a young boy got through a barrier at the Cincinnati Zoo and fell into the gorilla enclosure. Inside was Harambe, a powerful silverback gorilla. The boy was trapped with an animal strong enough to kill him in a moment. People watching cried out in fear.

Harambe began dragging the child through the enclosure. Imagine being that child's parents, helpless at the railing as their son lay within the animal's reach.

The zoo's response team faced a terrible decision. A tranquilizer could take minutes to work, and the dart itself might agitate the gorilla. The child was in immediate danger. The team fired, killing Harambe. The boy survived.

There was sorrow and outrage over the death of this endangered animal. Petitions and protests followed, and fierce arguments began about the zoo and the child's parents. The concern for Harambe was real and understandable. But the little boy's life, which the team had acted to protect, had to remain at the center of the decision.

The Torah teaches compassion toward animals. *Tza'ar ba'alei chayim* - causing unnecessary suffering to animals - is a serious Torah concern. But compassion must be guided by perspective. When a child's life is at stake, protecting the child comes first. A noble cause cannot become more important than the purpose it is meant to serve.

And now, back to that map of Brooklyn.

Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz was one of the great pioneers of Torah education in America. He preferred to be called *Mr. Mendlowitz*, not Rabbi. He poured his life into building Yeshiva Torah Vodaath into a center of Torah learning at a time when the future of serious Torah education in America was far from certain.

But another yeshiva, Mesivta Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, needed talmidim as it developed under Rav Yitzchok Hutner. Torah Vodaath was established; the newer mesivta needed a chance to grow. Reb Shraga Feivel could have said, "I worked too hard to build this. Why should I give away my best students?"

Instead, he drew a line on a Brooklyn map. Talmidim living east of that line would move from Torah Vodaath to Chaim Berlin. Among them was a remarkable young man, Yaakov Weinberg. He went on to become Rav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg, Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel, who shaped generations of talmidim.

Why would Reb Shraga Feivel do it? Because he understood something many people forget. He was not in the business of building *Torah Vodaath*. He was in the business of building *Torah*. If another yeshiva could spread more Torah, helping it succeed was part of his mission.

And perhaps this is the question each of us needs to ask. In business, are we so determined to win that we forget integrity? In our families, are we so determined to be right that we forget the feelings of someone we love? In our shuls and communities, are we so devoted to our own projects that we forget we are all building toward the same goal?

Avraham Avinu teaches that even chesed must answer to Borei Olam. Reb Shraga Feivel teaches that even our greatest achievement must never grow larger than the mission it serves.

Sometimes the greatest act of leadership is not what you are able to build. It is what you are willing to give up so that something greater can be built.

Reb Shraga Feivel drew a line on a map. But the truest line he drew was in his own heart - between loving what he built and loving *why* he built it.

*Good Shabbos.*

**NOT JUST  
BUILDING  
A YESHIVA.  
BUILDING TORAH.**

*The achievement matters because  
of the mission it serves.*

**Sources:** Meshech Chochmah, Bereishis 22:16-18; Bava Metzia 86b; Cincinnati Zoo statements, May 28-29, 2016; Change.org petition archive, May 2016; Ner Israel, *HaRav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg*, "Among Giants"; Rav Yissocher Frand, *Vayeira* 5774. Adapted for print from Mi Ka'Amcha Yisroel video: [youtu.be/V3vf4Qv3a7E](https://youtu.be/V3vf4Qv3a7E).