

Parshas Vayeira

by Rabbi Baruch Bodenheim
Rosh Yeshiva

Building Our Own Identity

When my father-in-law, Rabbi Singer zt"l, passed away close to two years ago, I was faced with an enormous task: how to lead Yeshiva Ner Boruch – PTI. I knew that I couldn't possibly replace Rabbi Singer. He was so unique. His love for every Jew was so palpable. He had an incredible singing talent and was able to make every occasion...happy! Plus, he had a distinctive way of engaging with people. My personality was different. Could I replicate some of his qualities?

After the Shivah, many roshei yeshiva and rabbeim calmed me down. They told me, "You have to be *you*! Take all the values and lessons you learned from Rabbi Singer and adapt them to your style. You will be successful by being the best version of you."

This powerful lesson is expressed at the end of Parshas Vayeira. Avraham was instructed by Hashem to sacrifice his beloved son, Yitzchak, born to him when he was 100 years old. This was the son who Hashem promised would be the future of Klal Yisrael. However, this was not just a test of Avraham. It was also a test of Yitzchak – to allow himself to be sacrificed! In different Piyyutim and Selichos, it credits the merit of Akeidas Yitzchak to *both* Avraham and Yitzchak.

However, the name "Akeidas Yitzchak" makes it clear that the test was primarily of Yitzchak. Yitzchak was to be offered as a *korban*, sacrifice, and he knew that if he were to flinch and cause the knife to make an initial nick, it would disqualify him as a korban. Therefore, Yitzchak requested to be bound so that he could not even twitch slightly out of fear.

Rav Dessler¹ notes that what was unique about the Avos and the Imahos was that each one had his or her own specific *middah*, defining character trait. Avraham's main attribute was *chesed*, kindness, but Yitzchak's main attribute was different. His *middah* was *gevurah*, the strength to submit himself totally to the will of Hashem. Yaakov had his own defining trait, different from the others: *emes*, truth. Yitzchak and Yaakov both took on the virtues of their parents, but they then used their own personal strengths to chart their own individual path in serving Hashem.

Indeed, that's part of our mission in life. We have to take what we received from our home and our educational environment and then apply it by using our own unique strengths. Otherwise, we are just going to mirror someone else's approach to serving Hashem, and not as well! Everyone has his own blend of talents to navigate his own mission and to deal with his own personal tests. To forge our own path, we need to use what we gained from our parents, teachers, and rabbeim, and build on that with our unique talents.

I committed to keep all the values with which Rabbi Singer founded the Yeshiva. The emphasis is on learning Torah in depth and making it available to *every* person who wants to learn, regardless of background, in a warm and welcoming environment in which they feel comfortable and loved.

In the past two years, so many new people started learning at PTI. The Young Professionals initiative expanded to a full Night Seder (four nights a week!) and Kinyan HaMasechta Chabura every morning. The morning seder for ba'al habatim recently completed Perek Kirah in Gemara Shabbos, one of the most complex sections in Shas. Our kollel expanded to a full-day kollel with twelve avreichim.

In two weeks, we will be having our groundbreaking for PTI's new building. This was a monumental plan of Rabbi Singer that he did not get to see in his lifetime. The new building will have much more space to accommodate all those who wish to learn at PTI, with multiple shiur-rooms and an additional beis medrash. The building will be built based on the precepts and values of Rabbi Singer, with an emphasis on giving all those who enter a feeling of "home".

Please join me on Sunday, November 15th at 2pm as we start to build the future new home of PTI. Partner with me at this pivotal new juncture in our yeshiva's future!



This week's *Haftarah*¹ tells the story of *Elisha* and the prophet *Ovadia*'s² wife, who was in desperate need of funds to pay off her late husband's debts and spare her sons from being taken as slaves in payment. *Elisha* asked if she had anything in the house to which she answered that she had a little jug of oil. He instructed her to borrow vessels that would be miraculously filled with oil that could be sold to raise the necessary funds. However, before performing the miracle, he told her to take the little oil she had and smear all of the vessels. After she did so, all the vessels were miraculously filled.

The *Zohar*³ learns from the need for the vessels to have had some oil in them that *bracha*, *Hashem's* bounty, only comes down to this world if there is something in this world from which it can cultivate, and the *bracha* doesn't take effect on emptiness. *Ramban*⁴ explains that after the original creation of the world, *Hashem* no longer creates *יש מאין*, ex nihilo. Therefore, in order for the vessels to miraculously fill they required some preexisting oil from which the miracle oil could stem. The same, he adds, was the case with *Eliyahu* and the pitcher of flour⁵ that miraculously never emptied but nevertheless required a small amount of preexisting flour from which the miracle flour could grow. Similarly, *Hashem* sends His *bracha* to the whole world through the *שלחן*, the *table*, in the *Beis Hamikdash*. However, there must be something preexisting from which the *bracha* could grow, and the *לחם הפנים*, the 12 loaves of showbread, serves as this preexisting element from which the bounty grows to sustain the world. In fact, the *Zohar* points out that it is for this reason that the *שלחן* may never be empty of the *לחם הפנים* even for a moment. The *Zohar*⁶ develops this theme to explain the relationship between *Shabbos* and the other days of the week as well. The *bracha* for the entire week stems from *Shabbos* just as the *bracha* for the entire world stems from the *שלחן*. But, just as the *שלחן* needs the preexisting *לחם הפנים*, so too *Shabbos* needs the meals that we prepare to serve as the source for *bracha* for the rest of the week.

Based on this concept, the *Zohar* says that when we *bench* after we eat, we should make sure that at least a little bread is left on the table. We ask *Hashem* to sustain us, but we can't expect a miracle of *יש מאין* but only that the next meal grows from what is left of the current meal. Indeed, *Shulchan Aruch*⁷ records this *halacha*, and *Mishnah Berurah*⁸ explains that it is based on our story⁹. (Alternatively, he quotes another reason from the *Levush*¹⁰ that the bread must be left on the table during *benching* to make it visibly clear that we are thanking *Hashem* for His great kindness and goodness in providing sustenance for all of creation.) *Sefer Ta'amei Haminhagim*¹¹ adds from the *Maharshal* that not only

should there be bread on the table but one should also make sure that no empty dishes remain on the table during *benching* because the *bracha* doesn't come down from above to empty vessels.

Additionally, *Mishnah Berurah*¹² quotes *Shelah Hakadosh*¹³ who quotes from *Seder Chasidim*¹⁴ that one should leave over a piece of the bread that was used for the *bracha* of *Hamotzi* to eat at the end of the meal so that the taste of the *Hamotzi* will remain in his mouth¹⁵ in fulfillment of the promise of the *pasuk*¹⁶ ברוך טנאך ומשאתך, *blessed will be your basket and your kneading bowl*, which also can be understood as a promise that *bracha* will be take effect on the *מאכל*, the leftovers of the food, as it is written¹⁷ והשאיר אחריו ברכה, *and it will leave a blessing behind it*. Perhaps the need for the remaining taste from the previous bounty is to create an appropriate receptacle for further *bracha* based on this concept.

Yet, there was a second condition that *Elisha* required from *Ovadia's* wife before the pitchers could miraculously fill with oil. *Elisha* told her to close the door. *Rashi*¹⁸ explains that it is proper respect for the miracle for it to be concealed. However, similar to the above requirement for preexisting oil based on the concept that there are specific prerequisites for *bracha* to be brought down to this world, perhaps the door had to be closed so that the vessels would be *סמוי מן העין*, *concealed from the eye*, so they would be fit for the *bracha* because the *Gemara*¹⁹ says that *bracha* is not found on objects that are measured and counted but only on what is hidden from the eye. (In fact, *Sefer Ta'amei Haminhagim* quotes an opinion that it is for this reason that full loaves of bread should be removed from the table for *benching* as full loaves are considered to be measured²⁰.)

Based on the need for the receptacle of *bracha* to be concealed and the idea that the *bracha* for the entire week stems from *Shabbos*, perhaps specifically from the *Shabbos* meals and *לחם משנה*, the two loaves of bread, *Aishel Avraham*²¹ suggests a novel explanation for the *minhag* to cover the *challahs* on *Shabbos*. He explains that since the *bracha* for the week stems from the *Shabbos challahs*, they must be concealed for the *bracha* to take effect. Similarly, there is a *minhag*, albeit apparently not common, to cover the bread that is left on the table during *benching*. Indeed, one of the reasons given²² is that as we ask for sustenance, that as per the above will specifically grow from the preexisting bread on the table, we cover the bread so that *Hashem's bracha* should take effect on something that is hidden from the eye.

- 1 מלכים ב ד:א-ז
- 2 ע' רש"י מלכים ב ד:א ד"ה מנשי
- 3 ספר הזוהר פרשת תרומה קנ"ג ע"ב, פרשת לך לך פ"ח ע"א-פ"ח ע"ב
- 4 פ' רמב"ן על התורה שמות כ"ה:כ"ד
- 5 מלכים א ז:ט"ז-ח:ט"ז
- 6 ספר הזוהר פרשת יתרו פ"ז ע"ב-פ"ח ע"א
- 7 שלחן ערוך או"ח ס' ק"פ סעי' א
- 8 משנה ברורה ס' ק"פ סעי' א
- 9 ע' מגן אברהם או"ח ס' ק"פ סעי' א ואשל אברהם (פ"מ) שם
- 10 לבוש מלכות או"ח ס' ק"פ סעי' א
- 11 ספר טעמי המנהגים עניני בהמ"ז אות קפ"ד

- 12 משנה ברורה ס' קס"ז ס"ק צ"ז
- 13 שני לוחות הברית שער האותיות אות ק ס' ק"ס
- 14 ספר חסידים ס' תתפ"ח
- 15 וע' אוצר דינים ומנהגים עמ' 415 ד"ה שריים שזה כמו אפיקומן
- 16 דברים כ"ח:ה
- 17 יואל ב:י"ד
- 18 רש"י מלכים ב ד:ב ד"ה וסגרת
- 19 תענית ח ע"ב
- 20 ע' שלחן ערוך או"ח ס' ק"פ סעי' ב
- 21 אשל אברהם (בוטשאטש) או"ח סוף ס' רע"א
- 22 ספר באר עשק שאלה כ"ז

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May All of Klal Yisrael Have a Good Shabbos!

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