

Parashat Vayera 5777, 2016:

Dare To Be Like Avraham!

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yeziel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzhak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the refuah shlaimah of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka and Leah bat Shifra, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

There are two times in *Sefer Bereishit* wherein we encounter the phrase, “*Va’ye’he acharei hadevarim ha’aleh*” (“And it came to pass after these matters”), toward the conclusion of our *parasha* and, later, in Parashat Vayechi:

And it came to pass after these matters, that it was told to Abraham saying: “Behold Milcah, she also bore sons to Nahor your brother.” (22:20)

And it came to pass after these matters that [someone] said to Joseph, “Behold, your father is ill.” So he took his two sons with him, Manasseh and Ephraim. (48:1, all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Each *pasuk* (verse) portends a significant turning point in Jewish history. The first is the prologue to, “And Bethuel fathered Rebecca,” announcing the birth of the future wife of Isaac, and mother of Jacob and Eisav; the second *pasuk* foreshadows the passing of *Ya’akov Avinu* (our Father Ya’akov), the transition from the Age of the Patriarchs to the Age of the Jewish Nation, and the ultimate creation of the covenantal community following *Kabbalat Hatorah* (the Receiving of the Torah).

Rashi (1040-1105) analyzes the meaning of “*va’ye’he acharei hadevarim ha’aleh*” as it pertains to our *parasha* in the following fashion:

And it came to pass after these matters: When he returned from Mount Moriah, Abraham was thinking and saying, “Had my son been slaughtered, he would have died without children. I should have married him to a woman of the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, or Mamre.” The Holy One, blessed be He, announced to him that Rebecca, his mate, had been born, and that is the meaning of “after these matters,” i.e., after the thoughts of the matter that came about as a result of the *Akeidah* (the Binding of Isaac).

Rashi’s midrashically-inspired comment focuses upon three major points. Firstly, he explains that “after these matters” refers to Abraham’s thoughts and anxieties subsequent to the *Akeidah*. This clarification is necessary, as confusion could result from the intervening verse between the end of the *Akeidah* and the words, “and it came to pass after these matters.” Secondly, Rashi’s gloss reveals Abraham’s remorse concerning his failure to find a wife for Isaac prior to the *Akeidah* since, theoretically, this omission could have resulted in Isaac dying without issue, signaling the end of monotheism, the most spiritually transformative movement in world history. Lastly, Rashi notes, “the Holy One blessed be He, announced to him [Abraham] that Rebecca, his [Isaac’s] mate, had been born.”

The second Sochatchover rebbe, Rav Shmuel Bornsztain *zatzal* (1855-1926), raises a penetrating question regarding Rashi’s explanation of our phrase, “and it came to pass after these matters.” He asks, “Why did it matter to him [Abraham] what had happened in the past [when he had not found a wife for Isaac], since Isaac had not been slaughtered [at the time of the *Akeidah*]?” (*Sefer Shem Mishmuel*, Parashat Chayeh Sarah, 1911, this and the following translations and brackets my own) In other words, why did Abraham have such depth-level angst concerning the past, when, after all, Isaac was alive and potentially able to begin a family? I believe Rav Bornsztain’s deeply insightful answer to this question captures the very essence of Abraham’s persona:

This matter [of Abraham’s consummate anxiety regarding the past] is based on the underlying notion that Abraham thought he was the reason as to why Isaac was not slaughtered [at the *Akeidah*]; since he had not found Isaac a wife and he had not fathered children. As such, it was

impossible for the Holy One blessed be He's words, "Please look heavenward and count the stars, if you are able to count them...So will be your seed" (15:5) to be fulfilled. This [i.e. the outcome of the *Akeidah* as we know it], however, would not have been the case, in Abraham's view, if Isaac had already fathered children, for, then the Holy One blessed be He would have chosen Isaac for a *korban olah* (a completely consumed burnt offering). This, then, is the reason for Abraham's consternation [after the *Akeidah*,] since he felt he had diminished his service to the Holy One blessed be He by not having found Isaac a wife.

In sum, we can now begin to appreciate the degree of devotion that Abraham had for Hashem. True, he certainly must have rejoiced that Isaac was alive; yet, he nonetheless was pained to the depth of his being that "he had diminished his service to the Holy One blessed be He by not having found Isaac a wife." As Rav Bornsztain so aptly notes, "When one carefully examines the subject [of the *Akeidah* and Abraham's ensuing reaction,] we can see the [spiritual] heights that he achieved and his [overwhelming] love for the Holy One blessed be He..." (*Sefer Shem Mishmuel*, Parashat Vayera, 1913)

Based upon the second Sochatchover rebbe's keen analysis, we now know that Abraham's life was the embodiment of the second verse of the *Shema*: "And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means." (*Sefer Devarim* 6:5)

According to Rashi, these three terms convey the following meaning:

With all your heart: ... Another explanation; "with all your heart," is that your heart should not be divided [i.e., at variance] with the Omnipresent (*Midrash Sifrei*).

And with all your soul: Even if He takes your soul (*Midrash Sifrei*; *Talmud Bavli*, *Berachot* 54a, 61a).

And with all your means: ... Another explanation of this is: You shall love G-d with whatever measure He metes out to you, whether it be the measure of good or the measure of retribution.

With the Almighty's help, may we strive to emulate Abraham's profound love and devotion to Hashem, with all our hearts, and with all our souls and with all our means. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.