



# ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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## PARSHAT VAYEIRA

The beloved stories of the life of Avraham are found in our Parsha. Avraham hosts the angels who tell him of the impending birth of Yitzchak to Sarah. G-d tells Avraham of His intent to destroy Sodom; Avraham pleads on their behalf. The city of Sodom is destroyed, Lot is saved. The nations of Moav and Amon are born from Lot and his daughters. Avraham sojourns in Gerar. Sarah gives birth to Yitzchak. Hagar and Yishmael are sent away. Avraham makes a pact with Avimelech. The parsha concludes with the dramatic story of Akeidat Yitzchak, the near death of Yitzchak at the hands of Avraham.



### 1ST ALIYA (18:1-14)

G-d appears to Avraham. 3 men are warmly welcomed by Avraham with lavish hospitality. They announce to him that by this time next year Sarah will have a child. She overhears this from the tent and laughs, for her ability to bear a child is a thing of the past. G-d protests – is anything too much for G-d – this time next year you will have had a child.

This story is a precious glimpse into the home of Avraham and Sarah. The whole house participates in the kindness – Avraham, Sarah, the young helpers. And the word run or fast occurs 4 times in 6 verses. This is an energetic, enthusiastic welcome.

The eager hospitality modeled by Avraham becomes the paradigm of chesed for the Jewish people.

Sarah laughs at the news that she will have a child. She is reprimanded for that. But Avraham laughed at the same news at the end of last week's parsha. He is not reprimanded. Rashi comments there: laughter comes in 2 forms. Simcha, happy laughter. And scoffing. Avraham laughed; wow, look at that, me 99, she 90 – and we'll have a child! Sarah scoffed, guffawed: what? Me at 90 and he at 99? Don't think so.

She has a point. Sarah is the realist. Avraham the dreamer. Jewish history will need the dreamers and the realists. The Avot tend to be the dreamers; the Imahot, the women, the realists.



### 2ND ALIYA (18:15-33)

The men leave for Sodom. G-d reasons that He may not withhold from Avraham, the champion of

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from this Torah Tidbits  
be in loving memory of and לע"נ  
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*Rita, Dina, Rebekah & family,*  
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justice, of His plan to destroy Sodom. Avraham challenges Him: How can You destroy the righteous along with the wicked? And how can You destroy the place if there are righteous people present? Avraham presses his point.

The generosity of Avraham continues, though expressed quite differently here. He refuses to allow, unchallenged, the destruction of Sodom. And his argument changes. The first argument is: why should the same fate be for both righteous and wicked? If You destroy the city, then the same fate awaits both righteous and wicked. A just G-d would punish the wicked, but not the righteous. But then he turns the tables. Don't spare the righteous and punish only the wicked; rather, save the whole city, wicked and all. Avraham is pleading for the lives of the wicked.

Avraham has great generosity of spirit. The Judge of all can judge the wicked; my role is to be generous to them. He previously rescued Lot and all the people of Sodom who had been taken captive in the wars of the 4 Kings and 5 Kings; these same people who then too were already described as wicked. Further on in our parsha, he is not happy with Sarah wanting to send Yishmael away, even though his behavior is not to Sarah's liking. This too is his generosity of spirit.

We would be true students of Avraham if we left the judgement of our fellow man to Him, and were generous to a fault to them instead.



### 3RD ALIYA (10:1-20)

The men journey to Sodom. Lot prevails on them to stay with him. The men of the city object to

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the presence of these foreigners. It turns violent. The visitors tell Lot that Sodom is to be destroyed and he must leave quickly. His sons in law refuse. The morning dawns and Lot, his wife and daughters leave Sodom, told not to look back.

Lot is Avraham's closest relative. He seems to follow in the footsteps of Avraham. He welcomes the strangers, gives them a place in his home, serves them food. A parallel story to Avraham's kindness to them. But the lesson lies not in the similarities but in the differences. Lot is living in Sodom. That makes all the difference.

This story is the beginning of the theme that will dominate the rest of the book of Genesis: who of Avraham's family is in? And who is out? Avraham's family will inherit the covenant of the Jewish people – but who in his family? After all, Lot is his nearest of kin. With the imminent birth of Yitzchak, the question as to who will inherit the Land of Israel becomes urgent. Will it be all of Avraham's entourage? Lot, Yishmael, Yitzchak? Will Avraham's generosity of spirit extend to the promise of the Land – will he want to include his broader family unit?

Well, one person we can see is not going to be a part of Jewish history: Lot. Lot writes himself out of that possibility with his association with Sodom.



#### 4TH ALIYA (19:21-21:4)

Lot is told to flee Sodom. The cities of Sodom and Gemora are destroyed. Lot's wife looks back and turns to a pillar of salt. Avraham looks out from the hills and sees the destruction. Lot flees to the hills. The 2 daughters of Lot ply him with wine and become pregnant from him,

reasoning that they are the only ones left in the world. They name their children Moav and Amon. Avraham goes to Gerar. Avimelech is told by G-d not to touch Sarah. Avimelech confronts Avraham as to why he hid Sarah's identity from him. Avraham responds: I saw there is no fear of G-d here. G-d fulfills what he promised to Sarah. She gives birth to Yitzchak. Avraham circumcises him as G-d commanded.

There is a lot of "seeing": Lot should not look back, while Avraham is looking over the plain. The daughters see themselves as Noah and family – the sole survivors. Avraham sees there is no fear of G-d.

Lot did not see, or take to heart that he lived amongst sinners. What Lot did not see around him Avraham perceived immediately in Gerar; there is no fear of G-d here.

The story of Lot's daughters is tragic self-deception. Rav Hershel Schachter likes to point out – did they really think, of all the people in the world, they are the most righteous to be saved? There is no one else in the entire world except them? Really? What about Avraham? How did they feel the next day when they walked down the street and saw a whole world of people?



#### 5TH ALIYA (21:5-21)

Yitzchak grows and is weaned. Sarah sees Yishmael playing with Yitzchak. She tells Avraham to banish this boy, for he will not inherit on a par with Yitzchak. This troubles Avraham but G-d tells him to listen to Sarah. Avraham arises early, sends away Hagar and Yishmael. They go to the desert of Be'er Sheva. The water runs out. Hagar cannot bear to see the death of her child and cries. An angel calls to her. Her eyes are opened, she sees a

well and gives water to Yishmael.

The next generation of the Jewish people has now been born. Who will be part of the covenant? Lot is out, but he is not a child of Avraham, albeit a nephew. Sarah tells Avraham that Yishmael, although a child of Avraham, is not the next generation of the Jewish people. Yishmael's banishment is a parallel story to the Akeida that we are about to read. In both stories Avraham arises early, a child walks with a parent, the child's life is in danger, an angel calls, the parent sees what they did not see before, the child is saved. Similar stories teach that G-d cares and saves the one in distress. But similarities are only similar – they are not the same. Yishmael will not be Yitzchak's equal in the next generation of the Jewish people.



#### 6TH ALIYA (21:22-34)

Avimelech initiates a pact with Avraham in Be'er Sheva. They name the place Be'er Sheva from the word to swear. Avraham calls out in G-d's name in Beersheva.

Avraham's fame has prompted a pact. Why would Avimelech make such a pact? It would seem that not only is Avraham famous, but so too are the Divine promises of inheriting the Land of Israel. People know about them. And believe them and respect them. So, they would rather be on Avraham's side.



#### 7TH ALIYA (22:1-24)

Akeidat Yitzchak, the binding of Isaac. Avraham is told to take Yitzchak and offer him as an offering. On the way, Yitzchak questions Avraham. They arrive at the mountain. At the last moment, the angel calls to Avraham. Avraham has

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proven his loyalty to G-d's command. He sees a ram caught in the bush and offers it in the place of Yitzchak. They return to Be'er Sheva.

The most dramatic story in the Torah. A story of absolute loyalty to the Divine command but also one of pathos and irony. The man of generosity, who pleaded for the lives of the wicked of Sodom now prepared to take the life of his son. The one who challenged the injustice of the impending destruction of Sodom, now has no voice of objection. And the most obvious – the one who waited patiently for 25 years for the promise of a child – and a future – now prepared to destroy it all.

A story that can be pondered and studied for a lifetime. Perhaps, one element of the story pertains to the promises. While the promises to Avraham of fame, family and fortune have been granted by G-d. And the promise of his family inheriting the Land of Israel is now able to take shape. So everything in life works out just right. No. Do not think G-d's reach for man and for the Jewish people will be without its complexity, its sacrifices, its mysteries in trying to understand the ineffable ways of G-d. While an intimate bond is being created of G-d's love for the Jewish people, and while we are increasingly being drawn to Him, He remains opaque, inscrutable,

mysterious, ineffable. We live with Divine intimacy and vast distance simultaneously.

## HAFTORAH - 2 KINGS , 4:1-37

This week's parsha famously tells us that although Avraham and Sarah were advanced in age they miraculously bear a child. Along these same lines the *haftorah* this Shabbat describes a similar incident in which the navi Elisha assures an elderly childless woman that she will bear a child.

Elisha would often pass through the city of Shunem. A couple who lived in the town offered a place for Elisha to stay. They even made a guest room that Elisha could use whenever he needed. Elisha became aware that the couple was childless. He blessed the woman that she would give birth. Indeed a year later a son was born to the couple.

The story does not end there. A few years later the son died suddenly. The woman called Elisha back to her home. Elisha quickly came and miraculously was able to bring the child back to life. ■

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parents/grandparents

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this issue of Torah Tidbits  
be in loving memory of  
our father, grandfather,  
great-grandfather

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on his 15th yahrzeit - כ"ד מרחשון

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