31 OCTOBER 2026 | 20 CHESHVAN 5787 VOLUME 40 | #9

DAF HASHAVUA

וַיֵּרָא | VAYERA

SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 5.24pm
Birmingham: 5.29pm
Bournemouth: 5.35pm
Cardiff: 5.39pm
Dublin: 5.45pm
Edinburgh: 5.29pm
Glasgow: 5.34pm
Hull: 5.25pm
Leeds: 5.26pm
Liverpool: 5.35pm
Manchester: 5.30pm
Nottingham: 5.29pm
Sheffield: 5.31pm
Southend: 5.20pm
Southport: 5.36pm
Jerusalem: 5.28pm

The United Synagogue

SIDRA BREAKDOWN

וַיֵּרָא
VAYERA

4th Sidra in:
בְּרֵאשִׁית
BEREISHIT

By Numbers:
147 VERSES
2,085 WORDS
7,862 LETTERS

Headlines:
AVRAHAM'S DILEMMAS

VAYERA:
Artscroll p.78
Hertz p.63
Koren Sacks p.107
Soncino p.86

HAFTARAH:
Artscroll p.1134
Hertz p.76
Koren Sacks p.1419
Soncino p.113

SIDRA SUMMARY

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – BEREISHIT 18:1-14

Shortly after Avraham's *brit milah* (circumcision), God appears to him in Elonei Mamre. Avraham greets three 'men' (in fact, angels – see Rashi) and serves them a fine meal. One of them tells Avraham that Sarah will have a baby boy in a year's time. Sarah overhears and laughs in disbelief.

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) –18:15-33

God reveals to Avraham His plan to destroy the wicked city of Sedom. Avraham pleads with God to spare the city, in the merit of any righteous people who might live there. However, there are not even ten righteous people living there.

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 19:1-20

Two of the men (angels) arrive in Sedom to rescue Lot, Avraham's nephew. Lot welcomes them into his house. The locals protest against Lot's hospitality and try to break down the door. Lot offers his daughters in return for the guests' safety. God strikes the townsfolk with blindness. The 'men' tell Lot to flee with his family.

4TH ALIYA (REVI'I) – 19:21-21:4

God rains down sulphur and fire from the heavens, overturning Sedom and its neighbouring cities. Lot's wife turns to look back and becomes a pillar of salt. Lot hides in a cave with his two daughters. On consecutive nights, fearing that they are the last humans left, Lot's daughters get him drunk and each conceives a child from him.

Avraham moves to Gerar in the Negev. The local ruler Avimelech takes away Sarah, whom Avraham claims is his sister. God appears to Avimelech, warning him not to touch Sarah. Avimelech confronts Avraham, who defends his non-disclosure. Sarah gives birth to Yitzchak (Isaac), who has a *brit milah* on his eighth day.

Point to Consider: *Which of Lot's two daughters is considered in a more negative light? (see Rashi to 19:37)*

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 21:5-21

Sarah sees the negative effect that Avraham's wayward first son, Yishmael, could have on Yitzchak. She tells Avraham to send away Yishmael and his mother Hagar. They travel in the desert and Yishmael nearly dies of thirst. An angel appears, telling Hagar that a great nation will come from Yishmael. God opens Hagar's eyes and she sees a well of water.

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 21:22-33

Avraham makes a peace pact with Avimelech, establishing Avraham's rights to the wells he had already dug.

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI'I) – 22:1-24

God tells Avraham to bring Yitzchak as an offering. Having previously been told by God that Yitzchak would be his heir, and having always encouraged Avraham's acts of compassion and kindness, this Divine instruction defies logic. Nevertheless, Avraham obeys, showing his unconditional devotion to God, regardless of his logical understanding. As Avraham raises the knife, an angel appears, telling him not to touch Yitzchak, presenting instead a ram to sacrifice. Avraham is praised for his faith. Avraham is told about the birth of Rivkah (Rebecca), Yitzchak's future wife.

HAFTARAH (II KINGS 4:1-37)

The haftarah includes the moving story of the prophet Elisha's miraculous resuscitation of a young boy who had been born to the Shunamite lady who used to host Elisha in her house. Elisha had originally prophesied the birth of the boy.

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WHEN PAIN OPENS THE HEART

BY: **RABBI TOBY WEINIGER**
Hadley Wood Jewish Community

The Talmud makes an extraordinary statement about prayer:

"Anyone who asks for mercy on behalf of another, when he himself needs that very same thing, he is answered first" (*Bava Kamma* 92a).

The source for this comes from Avraham Avinu (our Forefather Abraham). Avimelech, King of Gerar, had abducted Sarah after Avraham had referred to her as his sister. Sarah was returned unharmed, but as a result of Avimelech's actions, his household was unable to have children. Avraham prayed for them, and the Torah records: "Avraham prayed to God ... and they gave birth".

Then, immediately afterwards, we read: "And God remembered Sarah".

Rashi explains that the Torah does not follow a chronological order here. Although the Torah reveals Sarah's blessing to us afterwards, it had in fact begun first. Avraham first prayed for Avimelech who needed the very blessing he himself lacked, and before Avimelech received his answer, Avraham's own need was answered.

What is the message?

For decades, Avraham and Sarah had themselves yearned for a child. Years earlier Avraham had cried out to God: "What can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless?" (*Bereishit* 15:2) and "You have given me no offspring" (v.3). This was one of the deepest pains of Avraham's life. Yet when Avraham encountered another family suffering in precisely that same area, his own longing did not prevent him from praying for theirs.

Suffering tends to narrow our world. When something we desperately want remains beyond our reach, it is easy for our thoughts to become dominated by *my pain, my disappointment, my future*. The absence begins to shape the way we see everything around us.

Avraham shows us another possibility. His pain did not close him off to the pain of others; it sensitised him to it. The very experience that could have turned him inward became the source of his compassion for somebody else.

It is one thing to pray for another person's health when we ourselves are well, or for another person's success when our own lives feel secure. It is something altogether greater to pray for another person when their need touches the very place in our own life that still hurts.

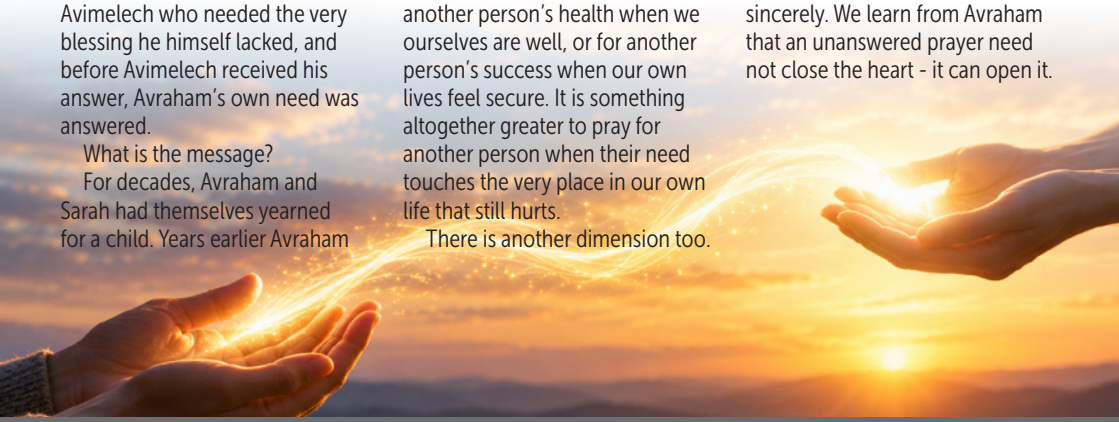
There is another dimension too.

> **"We learn from Avraham that an unanswered prayer need not close the heart - it can open it.**

Prayer can change the person who is praying.

If I can pray for someone else to receive the very blessing for which I myself am still waiting, then for that moment I am no longer defined only by what I lack. I have become, in some small way, a giver. I am no longer saying only, "God, please fill what is missing in my life." I am able to say, "God, let there be more blessing in the world - even if, for now, that blessing comes to someone else."

The places in life where we know longing, disappointment or uncertainty can become precisely the places from which we understand another person most deeply - and from which we are able to pray for them most sincerely. We learn from Avraham that an unanswered prayer need not close the heart - it can open it.



In loving memory of Mendel ben Aaron (Miller)

MATZAH IN SEDOM

BY: **RABBI MATT MARKS**
Executive Head of Tribe

These are hard years to be a Jew in Britain, and it's years like these when a voice like Rabbi Sacks' is missed most. When we discuss Israel, antisemitism, safety, and the existential future of Anglo Jewry, it can feel as though what we need most is an army.

Rabbi Sacks put the matter another way: "to defend a country you need an army. But to defend a civilisation you need schools."[1] During his time as Chief Rabbi, Jewish schools in Britain grew in number and in size, and now our children see much of their Jewish engagement taking place in school, on trips, or at shul. As a result, without quite deciding to, many of us have inadvertently outsourced most of the work of initiating our children into our tradition to places outside the home.

Vayera has its own household under pressure from the streets outside. When the angels reach Sedom, Lot, Avraham's nephew, brings them into his house for protection and bakes them *matzot*, unleavened bread (*Bereishit* 19:3). The guests arrived unannounced at night, and *matzah* is what you bake when there is no time to wait for dough to rise.[2] Rashi comments: *Pesach haya*, "it was Pesach".[3] Yet the Exodus from Egypt had not yet happened!

Rabbi Sacks zt"l with Rabbi Matt Marks

In fact, it appears that the leaving of Egypt was modelled on the departure from Sedom.[4] Lot's family shelters behind a shut door whilst the forces of destruction are outside (19:10–13). In Egypt, no one was allowed out of the door of their house until the morning, whilst the Destroyer passed (*Shemot* 12:22–23). Lot lingers, *vayitmahmah* (*Bereishit* 19:16); the Israelites leave with no time to linger (*Shemot* 12:39).

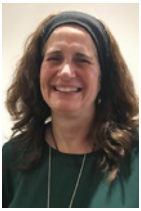
Both stories highlight the importance of the home. Lot kept Avraham's hospitality and so his home became a sanctuary. But Lot kept little else from the traditions he inherited, and so his home proved only a partial protection from the outside. There was *matzah* on his table, yet his family took his warning as a joke, and his wife looked back. In Egypt the blood went on the doorposts, and the Israelites needed to succeed where Lot failed.

I work in spaces designed to ensure Jewish continuity: schools, shuls and community centres. But a child who hears a language at home and is never taught it will usually speak it better than a child taught it at school who never hears it at home. When Judaism is taught at school and not spoken about at home, it becomes a subject, and parents become spectators of the chain we are meant to be links in.

Rabbi Sacks, for all his work for the schools, knew this. He also wrote that "there is nothing more important than home, the sacred bond of marriage, and the equally sacred bond between parent and child".[5] When he described where his own Judaism began, he wrote about his mother's cooking before Shabbat, "the soup, the *kugel*, the *lockshen*", and walking home from *shul* beside his father.[6]

One of the blessings of Rabbi Sacks is the accessibility of his work. May we all find ways to allow his teachings to add meaning to our homes, so that they can be a sanctuary in dark times and a source of light in the good times we hope to see.

[1] *From Optimism to Hope*, p. 131
[2] See Radak on *Bereishit* 19:3
[3] Rashi on *Bereishit* 19:3
[4] See Chanoch Waxman, "'The House of Bondage': The Exoduses from Egypt and from Sedom"
[5] Jonathan Sacks, "Walking Together", *Covenant & Conversation*, Vayera
[6] *Ibid*.



STANDING UP FOR WHO WE ARE: **BRITISH. JEWISH. PROUD.**

BY: **FIONA PALMER**
AJEX, Chief Executive

In *Parashat Vayera*, Avraham (Abraham) learns of God's intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Rather than remain silent, he steps forward. "Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" he asks, pleading for justice. Avraham sees something he believes is wrong and has the courage to speak up.

That message feels particularly relevant today. At a time of rising antisemitism when many Jews feel uncomfortable displaying their Jewish identity, *Vayera* reminds us of the importance of standing up for our values and for who we are.

For AJEX, that means being proud of our identity as both British and Jewish, an identity and contribution that stretches back generations and continues today.

Jewish service to Britain has been extraordinary. During the First World War, 50,000 Jews served in British Forces and during the Second World War more than 70,000 Jews served, with many making the ultimate sacrifice.

Among them was Petty Officer Thomas William Gould, who showed extraordinary courage aboard H.M. Submarine Thrasher during the Second World War. After an attack left two unexploded bombs lodged in the submarine, Gould and a fellow crew member risked their lives to remove them, saving the vessel and those on board. Gould was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery. His story embodies the courage at the heart of *Vayera*: the willingness to step forward when the moment demands it.

Women contributed through military service, nursing, engineering and technical roles as well as vital work on the home front. British Jews did not stand apart from the defence of this country. They stood up and played their part.

That contribution did not end in 1945. Jewish men and women continue to serve in HM Armed Forces today, carrying forward this tradition of service.

AJEX grew from that same determination. Founded by Jewish veterans at a time of growing fascism and antisemitism, the organisation understood that a powerful answer to those who questioned whether Jews belonged in Britain was the undeniable record of Jewish service and sacrifice.

Nearly a century later, that message has renewed significance.

Vayera teaches us that there are times when remaining silent is not enough. Avraham stepped forward because his values compelled him to speak. Today, standing up against antisemitism also means refusing to allow others to decide who we are or whether we belong.

When thousands gather at the Cenotaph for the AJEX Annual Remembrance Parade, we remember those who served and honour those who continue to serve. We also make a visible statement about who we are and the contribution British Jews have made to this country. We have contributed to Britain. We continue to contribute. We will not retreat in the face of antisemitism.

> **“ Today, standing up against antisemitism also means refusing to allow others to decide who we are or whether we belong.**

This year, more than ever, our community needs to come together and be seen. Join us at the Parade on Sunday 15th November at 2pm at the Cenotaph, Whitehall. Whether you march or support as a spectator, your presence matters as we remember those who served and show that we are British. Jewish. Proud.

In loving memory of Harav Yisrael ben Eliyahu z"l

ISRAEL IN THE PARASHA

This series is an adaptation of short ideas written by former Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits z"l in the 1960s, which were later reprinted in a compilation of his writings, 'Mishnat HaSar'.

VAYERA: THE LAND AS THE SPIRITUAL CENTRE OF THE WORLD

Long before the Jewish people settled in the Land of Israel, it was destined to become the spiritual centre of the Jewish nation. "The Land of Moriah" (*Bereishit* 22:2), where God commanded Avraham to offer Yitzchak (Isaac), is identified as Jerusalem. Rashi connects the name 'Moriah' to *hora'ah* (instruction), explaining that it is the place "from where instruction goes forth to Israel." Only this place was fitting for God's Presence to dwell and for offerings to be brought (Rashi on 22:14).

A related idea is found in another verse in the *parasha*, extending the significance of the Land beyond the Jewish people to the wider world: "Avraham will surely be a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him" (*Bereishit* 18:18). The Jerusalem Talmud teaches that there must always be at least thirty *tzadikim* (righteous individuals) in the world comparable to our forefather Avraham. This is hinted to in the word יהיה ("he will be"), whose *gematria* (numerical value) is thirty. Sometimes most of these *tzadikim* are in Babylon, and at other times they are in the Land of Israel. The Sages add that "it is a good sign for the world when the majority are in the Land" (*Avodah Zarah* 2:1).

Thus, the Land of Israel serves not only as the spiritual centre of the Jewish people, but also as a source of blessing for the entire world.

PHRASE OF THE WEEK

BY: **RABBI ALEX CHAPPER** | Borehamwood & Elstree United Synagogue

Each week, working our way through the alphabet, we explore a Jewish word or phrase, bringing clarity and deeper understanding to its meaning.

Does **PLAG HAMINCHA** mean:

1. Afternoon offering? | **2.** Fine flour? | **3.** Half of Mincha?

Plag HaMincha literally means "half of *Mincha*," as *plag* is the Aramaic word for "half".

It refers to the halfway point between *Mincha Ketana* and *Shekia*. *Mincha Ketana* (considered by some authorities to be the preferred time to say *Mincha*) is two and a half halachic hours before *Shekia*. *Shekia* is "sunset," when the sun is no longer visible above the horizon, and is considered the end of the day according to *halacha*.

Plag HaMincha, often simply called *Plag*, is therefore one and a quarter halachic hours before sunset. In practice, it is the earliest time Shabbat candles can be lit, and the earliest time Chanukah candles can be lit on a Friday.

The *Mishna* records two opinions regarding the latest time for davening *Mincha*. One considers *Plag HaMincha* the cut-off, after which the time for *Maariv* begins. The other considers *Shekia* the cut-off. The first opinion connects *Mincha* with the Temple's incense offering, which was brought at least one and a quarter hours before sunset. The second connects it with the afternoon offering, which could be brought as long as it was still daytime.

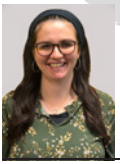
Both views are accepted in *halacha*. In practice, many communities daven *Mincha* and *Maariv* consecutively after *Plag HaMincha*.

These times vary throughout the year because halachic hours are calculated by dividing the daylight period into twelve equal parts. Consequently, a halachic hour is longer in summer and shorter in winter.

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT VAYERA 30-31 OCTOBER | 20 CHESHVAN

"POOR ME..." OR "WHO NEEDS ME?"



BY: **SHIFRA CHESLER**

Community Liaison Manager, Tribe

Imagine you aren't feeling well one day. You're in pain, you have no energy, and even getting off the couch feels like too much effort. We might think: "Poor me. I'm just going to curl up on the couch and go to sleep!" That's a natural reaction. The last thing on our mind would be, "How can I help someone else?"

But in this week's *parasha*, Avraham teaches us something incredible. Avraham had just performed the mitzvah of *Brit Milah* on himself, at the age of 99. He was recovering and in pain. Yet instead of focusing on himself, he was looking out for someone he could help.

The *Midrash* tells us that God made the day especially hot because He knew that if Avraham saw travellers, he would want to invite them into his home; He wanted him to rest. But Avraham sat at the entrance of his tent, looking out for guests. Even when he had every reason to think about himself, he was thinking about others. And, when he finally saw three travellers approaching, the Torah tells us that he ran towards them.

It's easy to be kind when life is going well. Real kindness is looking beyond ourselves even when we're tired, busy, upset or struggling. We can still notice someone sitting alone, help a sibling, or check in on a friend.

What's amazing is that, when we help others, we often start to feel better ourselves. By focusing on someone else's needs, we stop thinking only about our own difficulties and start to feel better. That's not why we do *chesed*, kindness, but it's a wonderful side benefit. Sometimes the best way to lift ourselves up when we're having a difficult day is to reach out and help someone else[1].

This week, let's follow Avraham's example and ask ourselves: "Who can I help?"

[1] If you are struggling with anything more serious, please speak to someone you trust and seek the support you need.

Vayera Alphabet Soup

Unscramble the letters to form words found withn this weeks *parasha*:

V R A H M A A

G L A N E S

G U L A H

O L T

M O O D S

T I Z Y K A C H

R A G A H

K I D A E A H

M R A

Answers: 1. Avraham 2. Angels 3. Laugh 4. Lot 5. Sodom 6. Yitzchak 7. Hagar 8. Akeidah 9. Ram

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA (YEHOSHUA): PART EIGHT

THE TRIBE SCRIBE

Help Is on its Way.

Writer: Rabbi Nicky Goldmeier Cartoonist: Paul Solomons

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