



Parsha Encounters

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Parshas Vayeira – Rabbi Moshe M. Willner

Living the High Life

The theme of the weekly haftorah usually corresponds some way to the parshah. This week, a clear connection is seen. Sarah Imeinu is informed that she will have a son. Similarly the Shunamis woman is blessed with a child by the prophet Elisha. Perhaps we can suggest another relationship between the haftorah and the parsha. The haftorah relates that after a child was born to the Shunamis woman, a tragic incident occurred. The child went out to his father in the field where harvesting was being done. The posuk then relates how the child called out, "My head, my head!", and soon after passed away. The haftorah ends with the child's miraculous revival through Elisha the prophet.

Why was this child deserving death? A possible explanation can be gleaned from what transpired prior to his death. As mentioned above, he went to the field to observe the harvest. Although it may seem like a harmless place to be, this was held against him. For someone who was born in a miraculous way, through the blessing of a prophet, more was expected of him. It was not befitting for him to be hanging out in the field. He was meant to be a man of spirituality- not a man of the field.

There is a great lesson for us to learn from this episode. We all are products of miracles, by virtue of the mere fact that we exist after

so many families were wiped out in the holocaust, or lost their connection to Yiddishkeit. How fortunate are we- the few who actually merit to live Torah lives! Is this not a supernatural event?! However, like the son of the Shunamis woman, that means we must live on a higher level. Hashem doesn't do miracles for us to live mere, natural, mundane lives. We must focus on living lives of higher existence.

Perhaps this is another connection to our parsha. After Avrohom Avinu passed the test of the Akeida the posuk states "Avrohom returned to his young men..." The midrash inquires where is Yitzchak? Why is he not mentioned in the posuk? The answer is, says the medrash, that Yitzchak did not return with Avrohom. Rather, he went to learn in Yeshivas Shem and Ever. Possibly the reason Avrohom chose to send Yitzchak to yeshiva is similar to the message of the Shunamis's son. After Yitzchak was saved in a supernatural way, he now needed to live on even a higher level. Through leaving his home and immersing himself in the Torah learnt in a Yeshiva setting, he was recognizing his greater responsibilities.

May we all merit to realize the miracle of our existence, and the responsibility that accompanies it.

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Halacha Encounters

Three Small Steps

Rabbi Avi Weinrib

In this week's *parsha* the *Torah*, recounts the episode of Avrohom interceding on behalf of the city of *Sedom*. The *posuk* [18-23] relates, "*Vayigash Avrohom*" - And Avrohom came forward and presented his plea on behalf of *Sedom*. *Rashi* comments that the word *Vayigash*, is used in other places as a reference to coming forward to either do battle, to appease, or to *daven*. In this case, Avrohom incorporated all three of these methods in his defense of *Sedom*. The *Sefer Roke'ach* [*Tefillah*-322] writes that when one is about to begin the *Shemoneh Esrei*, he should take three steps forward to correlate to the 3 times the word *Vayigash* is mentioned in reference to *tefillah*. [He understands the *Vayigash* mentioned by *Yehudah* and *Eliyahu* to be a reference to *Tefillah* unlike the opinion of *Rashi*.] In this week's Halacha Encounter, we will discuss various aspects of how to begin and conclude the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Before *Shemoneh Esrei*

The *Rema* [95-1] quotes the above mentioned *Roke'ach* that before beginning *Shmoneh Esrei* one should take three steps forward as a way of coming close to *Hashem* to *daven*. The *Mishna Berura* [95-3] quotes the *Eliyahu Raba* that one is not required to first take 3 steps backwards before going forward. However, he writes that the accepted custom is to first take 3 steps back and then 3 steps forward. The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* [18-2] writes that upon reaching the words "*Tehilos Likel Elyon*" one should take the 3 steps back and after reciting the words "*Go'al Yisroel*" take the three steps forward. The *Kaf Hachayim* [95-7] explains that one of the reasons for the three steps backward is that at first we are demonstrating our fear to come close and converse with *Hashem*. We then go forward to demonstrate that although we are filled with fear, we realize that *Hashem* in his infinite kindness, allowed us to be able to come close and converse with Him.

After *Shmoneh Esrei*

The *Shulchan Aruch* [123-1] writes that upon completion of the *Shmoneh Esrei* one should take 3 steps backwards similar to how a servant leaves the presence of his master. There are a number of reasons given to explain the significance of the three steps. The *Magen Avrohom* [123-1] writes that *Nevuchadnezzar* was able to destroy the *Bais Hamikdosh* as a reward for the three steps he took in honor of *Hashem* [see *Sanhedrin* 96a and *Medrash Shir Hashirim* 3-4]. We therefore take 3 steps and then *daven* for the rebuilding of the *Bais Hamikdash*. The *Bais Yosef* quotes *R' Hai Gaon* that there were three steps taken by the *Kohanim* when bringing the *Korban Tamid* on the *mizbayach* which we are imitating.

How?

The *Shulchan Aruch* [123-3] writes that one should begin stepping back with the left foot. This is to demonstrate the difficulty we have in leaving the presence of the *shechinah*. After going back one step with the left foot and lining up the front of the left foot with the back of the right foot the second step is to move the right foot back until the front of the right foot lines up with the back of the left. The third step is to move back the left foot to be equal to the right foot. The *Biur Halacha* [s.v. *Kishoporah*] writes that a lefty begins with his right foot and continues doing everything in the opposite way. The M.B. [123-14] writes that one should not take steps bigger than this as this was the size of the steps the *kohanim* took, and one of the reasons for these steps is to imitate those of the *kohanim*. Furthermore, one should not take steps smaller than these. If there is no room to go back three steps one should go to the side and take three steps. If this too is not an option, one should take three smaller steps rather than one or two full size steps. If the person behind you is still in the midst of *Shemoneh Esrei*, one may not take steps back and enter the space of four *amos* in front of the person.

The *Shulchan Aruch* writes that one should bow and take the three steps back while bowing. Then while continuing to bow, turn to the left and recite "*Oseh Shalom*" ... to the right and recite "*Hu Yaase*"... and then bow forward.

Taking steps forward

The *Shulchan Aruch* [123-2] writes that after taking the three steps backward, one should not return immediately forward. Doing so would undermine the idea of going back as a servant leaves his master. Therefore, one should wait until before *kedusha* to step forward, or at least until the *Shliach Tzibur* begins *chazaras hashatz*. In this way, one is returning in order to recite *kedusha* or at least is joining the *Shliach Tzibur* as he begins *Chazaras Hashatz*. Even when one davens at home they should wait the amount of time this would take. If one is unable to wait this amount of time, the minimum one can wait is the amount of time it would take to walk four *amos*.

Shliach Tzibur

The *Shulchan Aruch* [123-5] writes that the *Shliach Tzibur* does not take three steps back after *Chazaras Hashatz*. This is because he will take three steps back at the end of *Kaddish*, which will also suffice for *Chazaras Hashatz*.

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