

## *Introduction to Parsha #4: Vayera*<sup>1</sup>

<b><i>Torah:</i></b>	<b>Genesis 18:1 - 22:24</b>
<b><i>Haftarah:</i></b>	<b>II Kings 4:1-37</b>
<b><i>B'rit Chadasha:</i></b>	<b>II Peter 2:4-11; and Hebrews 11:13-19</b>



*Then he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him.*  
[Genesis 18:2]

Are you ready to embark on *a new season of expanded interaction between the man and his Creator*? The stage is set. The ***b'rit*** [covenant] is now firmly *in place*. It is now time for Avraham and Sarah – and all their progeny - to start to walk it out in real time.

Last week's parsha ended with Avraham consummating the ***b'rit*** by marking himself and all males in his household with the *unmistakable sign of Covenant Commitment*. This week we will discover if the dedication of the heart is as real as the mark in the flesh. We are now ready for *part II* of the Avraham chronicles – and for *phase II* of the Divine Romance!

### ***The Avraham Chronicles – Part II***

This *new era in God-man relations* upon which we now find ourselves ready to embark is going to be kicked-off in royal style - with one of the most dramatic God-encounters yet.

---

<sup>1</sup> All rights with respect to this publication are reserved to the author, William G. Bullock, Sr., also known as '*the Rabbi's son*'. Reproduction of material from any *Rabbi's son* lesson or communication without written permission from the author is prohibited. Copyright © 2015, William G. Bullock, Sr..

The Divine Visitation with which new era in God-man relations will begin will be a significant upgrade from the God encounters about which we studied in parsha *Lech Lecha*. The first post-*b'rit* God-encounter will in fact be unique among all the God encounters of the book of Genesis, because it will be the only God-encounter of the patriarchal period that *will involve more than one human being*. This Divine Visitation will involve not only Avraham, the Holy One's new covenant partner, but also Avraham's beloved *wife* Sarah. And before this Visitation is over, Lot, his unnamed wife, their unnamed daughters, and all the men of the Sodom will receive a Divine Touch as well.

### *A Vayera Travelogue*

What will we read about in Torah this week? With *b'rit* now in place the action is about to get *really intense*. *Angels are going to be everywhere* it seems. Sarah will finally get to participate in a God encounter. In the course of it she will hear for herself – from the lips of angels - the *promise of a child*. And what will she do? She'll *laugh!* And all Heaven will laugh with her.

Before the events of parsha *Vayera* who knows how long it had been since Sarah laughed! The journey of faith into which Avraham has drug her has definitely not been easy – especially for her. She has been uprooted from her home, from her country of birth, and from all familiar surroundings, family members and friends. She has endured the rigors of a long, perilous journey on foot through treacherous mountains, through dry, dusty deserts, and through foreign lands where she was leered at and looked upon as prey to be seized. She has been taken against her will into Pharaoh's harem. She has watched her husband - her only means of support as well as companionship – ride off to wage a war against vastly superior forces that logic told her was 99.9 % sure to result in his death and her widowhood. She has seen her husband take another woman to his tent, and felt the scorn of that woman when she was able to give Avraham the child Sarah had never been able to. No, this journey has not been easy for Sarah. It has undoubtedly been quite some time since she felt like she had any reason to laugh.

Ah, but Dear Reader, she who laughs *last* laughs *best!*

### *Avraham's Mission Is Upgraded*

In the course of the first Divine Visitation of parsha *Vayera* the mission of Avraham and his descendants in the earth – i.e. the part Avraham and his progeny are to play in the redemptive plan of the Holy One, will be plainly revealed. The Holy One will explain that mission as: “. . . *that he may enjoin/teach/instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of YHVH, to do righteousness and justice.*” Genesis 18:19. The redemptive plan of the Holy One

for mankind and Creation involves well-raised and instructed children; training in the ‘*Ways of YHVH*’, and bringing into full operation in real time upon the earth both YHVH’s ‘*righteousness*’ and YHVH’s ‘*justice*’.

### ***Avraham Bargains With the Holy One Over the Lives of Men***

After Avraham’s upgraded purpose is revealed we will see him engage in a level of God-man interaction that would have totally boggled the mind of the Ancients. Avraham will actually *barter* with the Creator of the Universe over the security of perverted cities and the lives of fallen men. The currency of the negotiation? You could probably have guessed it – it is *righteousness* and *justice*. Avraham is about to discover – as are we – first that man’s flawed ideas of what is righteous are nowhere close to the righteousness the Holy One offers, and secondly that man’s idea of justice is not even in the same universe as what the Holy One defines justice to be.

### ***Sodom and Gomorrah Receive Their Own Divine Visitation***

Meanwhile, do you remember Lot’s chosen retirement communities, Sodom and Gomorrah? Torah is going to give us an up close and personal view into the *perversion* and *unspeakable evil* that made the destruction of those cities absolutely essential. The *Ruach* will then describe the destruction of these two cities of perversion for us in extremely graphic terms - lest we ever forget what kind of judgment lies in store for those who *reject the goodness of their Creator in favor of perverse, violent and totally self-centered lifestyles*. As the Psalmist declares:

***He observes the sons of men; His eyes examine them.***

***The Holy One examines the righteous,***

***but the wicked and those who love violence His soul hates.***

***On the wicked He will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.***

***For the Holy One is righteous; and He loves justice; upright men will see His Face.***

**[Psalm 11:4(b)-7]**

In the aftermath of the judgment of the cities of the plain Torah will take a brief moment to explain to us how the nations of *Moav* (Moab) and *Ammon* - which will become Yisrael’s closest neighbors a few generations hence - came into being.

### ***The Ph’lishtim [Philistines] Get Introduced Into the Narrative of Torah***

Toward the end of the parsha the focus will shift back to Avraham. Driven westward toward the coast of the Mediterranean by the fallout from the tremendous implosion in the Jordan River Valley Avraham will meet the *Ph’lishtim* [you may know them as “*Philistines*”] for the first time.

While he is sojourning in the dominion of the *Ph’lishtim* Avraham will have a life experience reminiscent of what happened in Egypt a few chapters earlier. He will

again allow Sarah to be taken into a foreign palace by a pagan king - and the Holy One will again miraculously intervene on her behalf to keep her virtue and their relationship intact.

Think that's enough action for one week? Hardly! Indeed, the most *exciting* part of the parsha is yet to come.

### ***The Promised Child is Born!***

After Sarah is returned to Avraham safe and sound, the child of promise – the son and heir that the Holy One promised Avraham and Sarah years before - will finally arrive! His name will be 'Yitzchak'. We will be guests at both his *b'rit milah* [the 8<sup>th</sup> day circumcision ceremony] and at the *chag* [joyful festival] held to celebrate his weaning.

### ***Avraham's Ties With Yishma'el Are Severed***

Shortly after Yitzchak's weaning party Avraham will suffer what must have seemed like a stunning personal tragedy – as his son Yishma'el, along with Yishma'el's mother Hagar, will be expelled from the patriarchal camp and establish a bloodline – and a way of life – of their own.

### ***The First Middle-East Peace Agreement Is Negotiated***

Also in this week's parsha Avraham will cut the first-ever Middle-East Peace Agreement – a 'land for peace' covenant with the Ph'lishtim that will, for better or worse, change the history of the world forever.

### ***The Darkest Night of Avraham's Soul – the Moriyah Experience***

And finally, Dear Reader, we will walk with Avraham through the darkest night of his soul – as Torah takes us with him and Yitzchak on the climb up *Mount Moriyah*. The inspired narrative will cause us to feel the heat of the flames of the Holy One's altar, and make us shudder at the sight of a sharp flint slaughtering knife. It will then allow us to experience with Avraham something so indescribably wonderful – so magnificent – so transcendent and Divine and . . . well, let's just say it is something that will insure we – and our relationship with the Holy One - will never be the same again.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves again. Let's go back and begin at the beginning, shall we?

### ***Avraham's 1<sup>st</sup> Post-Brit God Encounter***

Torah does not tell us the date of the Divine Visitation that makes up Avraham's 6<sup>th</sup> overall, and first post-*b'rit*, God encounter. The sages<sup>2</sup> say, however, that the events of Genesis 18 took place *3 days after Avraham's circumcision*. As this week's parsha begins, the sages say, Avraham is still recovering from the painful procedure.

It is further taught by the sages that the Holy One's instruction to Avraham to circumcise himself and the males of his household was given on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishri [what later would be known as *Yom Kippur*]. The blood of circumcision was thus associated with the blood covering of the Day of Atonement. Atonement is, after all, what the *b'rit* between the Holy One and Avraham is all about.

Let us assume for the sake of discussion that the sages have the timing of this God encounter correct. If so Day 1 after the circumcision would be *11 Tishri*. Day 2 after the circumcision would be *12 Tishri*. Day 3 after the *circumcision would be 13 Tishri*. The events of Genesis 18 would then occur on *14 Tishri* – on the eve what would later come to be known as day 1 of *Sukkot* [the *Feast of Tabernacles*]. What better day would there be for Avraham to be sitting 'at the entrance' to his tent awaiting visitors?

### ***A New and Exciting Kind of Divine Visitation and A New and Exciting Level of God-Man Interaction***

Whatever day it may have been, we know that the Divine visitation began as Avraham was sitting in the entrance to his tent *in the heat of the day*. We also know that the Holy One *appeared* [Hebrew *yera*, a form of *ra'ah*, Strong's Hebrew word #7200] to him. But this manifestation of the Holy One is different from any of the previous encounters we have studied. This time the Holy One appears in the form

---

<sup>2</sup> Some who study Torah like to at least consider what the sages of Israel have to say about the narrative of the *parsha ha-shavua*, because they are aware of and appreciate the lifetimes of study, prayer, humility, deprivation, and in many cases horrible persecution, Israel's sages invested in their endeavors. Others take offense at the sages, and take up the attitude that anything and everything contributed by rabbis – whether in Mishnah, Gemora, Midrash, or otherwise – is automatically dangerous and destructive. Strangely, in this author's experience, people who take this approach often turn right around and quote – if not follow and fawn over other – other human writers – writers who happen to share their own religious predispositions and negativity towards all things "Jewish" or "rabbinical". Each person has to decide for himself, of course, what weight, if any he or she will attribute to the writings or opinions of any sage or scholar – of any religious background. The author of these studies sometimes refers to the writings of Israel's sages. These occasional references should not be interpreted to suggest in any way that the writings of sages, scholars, or theologians – be they from a Hebrew or Christian background, are anything close to equal in weight to the Torah of the Holy One. Scripture is Scripture. But wisdom is also wisdom, and revelation is also revelation – whoever its receiver may be.

of [or is it *along with?*] three angelic messengers who, interestingly, mostly act *as a unit* [an *echad*] throughout the passage<sup>3</sup>.

We know the destination of these angelic visitors – they are going to Sodom, to bear witness against it. No city, nor any man, is to be condemned except upon the testimony of two or three witnesses. These ‘men’ are the witnesses.

Who *are* these who appear suddenly opposite Avraham’s tent? We are never told in so many words. We are given no names<sup>4</sup>, no pedigrees, no personal information. Those who appeared to Avraham in the heat of the day are in Torah simply called *anashim* [the masculine plural form of the Hebrew word *enosh*, *alef*, *nun*, *shin*].

Perhaps there is a Hebraic message for us encoded in this description. The word *anash*, or *enosh*, as it is more commonly transliterated, is usually translated ‘man’, or ‘mortal’. In Hebraic pictograph however it paints a picture of the ultimate Source/Creator of all things [*alef*] making a son or heir [*nun*] manifest and visible [*shin*]. That picture could be described as ‘*the manifestation of the Son of God*’.

Here is how the parsha begins:

***Vayera elav Adonai b'Elonei Mamre***

*And the Holy One appeared to [Avraham] in the Plains of Mamre*

***V'hu yoshev petach-ha-ohel kechom ha-yom***

*while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the hottest part of the day*

***Vayisa eynav vayar v'hineh sh'loshah anashim***

*And [Avraham] lifted his eyes. And behold! Three strangers*<sup>5</sup>

***nitzavim alav vayar v'yarotz***

*standing a short distance from him*

[Genesis 18:1-2 (a)]

Although we know the *destination* of these three *anashim* we are not told specifically from whence they *came*. What is clear however is that, wherever they came from, Avraham did not see them until he ‘*lifted his eyes*’ – i.e. ‘looked up’ [see verse 2]. By that time, we are told, they were ‘*standing beside him*’ [Id.]. Where do *you* think these *anashim* came from?

<sup>3</sup> This brings to mind the events on the ‘Mount of Transfiguration’, when a Divine manifestation took place involving two groups of three – namely, Moshe, Eliyahu, and Y’shua on the one hand, and *Kefa* [**Peter**], *Ya’akov* [**James**], and *Yochanan* [**John**] on the other.

<sup>4</sup> It is posited by some that these three were the angels Michael, Gabriel, and Rafael, based upon the fact that the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew phrase of this phrase *V'hineh sh'loshah* – usually translated “*And Behold! Three*” - (i.e. 701) is identical to that of the phrase *These are Michael, Gabriel and Rafael*.

<sup>5</sup> Rashi’s commentary says these ‘men’ were angels in disguise.

Next we are told that despite the discomfort of his recent circumcision Avraham painfully, almost desperately, *runs* to the three messengers and *prostrates himself* before them. And then he cries out – not as to three but as to *One*:

*“If I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord,  
do not pass your servant by!”*<sup>6</sup>

[Genesis 18:3]

Please hear Avraham’s *passion* for the Holy One in this cry. This is not a casual invitation to share supper. It is instead a *gut-wrenching wail* for which there is really no language. Avraham, you see, has *tasted the Divine Presence*; and he *cannot bear the thought of being without it*.

### ***Don’t Pass Me By!***

Let these words of Avraham be *your cry* this week. As things are being ‘cut away’ from you, sometimes painfully, and as the heat of ‘the day’ bears down on you, look for the Holy One – seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. And when you find Him Beloved, *do not let Him go*. Do not let Him pass you by. Wash His Feet. Set a table for Him. Kill the fatted calf. Break bread with Him. And in the course of it all let Him *reveal His counsel* to you. And let your loved ones eavesdrop and overhear – even if they laugh.

Alas, our families live very close to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the judgment of our cities surely approaches. Pray this week for the appearance of ***Tzadikim*** [righteous ones] in our cities, villages, towns and communities. Without their arising and assuming their places it takes little imagination to know what will happen.

Negotiate with the Holy One this week concerning your loved ones, as Avraham negotiated with the Holy One over Lot and his family. And *pray earnestly* each day this week. Do not let your prayers become a vain repetition. Pray *in the spirit of our father Avraham . . . with your face in the sand . . . in the heat of the day*.

### ***Haftarah Vayera***

II Kings 4:1-37

Our haftarah reading this week is taken from the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of II Kings. The narrative will revolve around a lengthy season of interaction between a prophet of the Holy One named Elisha, two women, and two sons.

The first woman we will meet in this haftarah is a widow, the deceased husband of whom had been a prophet of the Holy One. After her husband died this woman

---

<sup>6</sup> In transliterated Hebrew: “*im-na matzati chen b'eyneycha al-na ta'avov me'al av'decha.*”

found herself totally without means of support and saddled with debts she could not pay. Her creditors were prepared to take her son – the son of the Holy One’s prophet - as a slave. All she possessed, it seemed, was a ‘pot of oil’. She cried out, and *Elisha heard*.

Elisha will give this widow and her condemned son instructions on what to do with her ‘pot of oil’, and the results will prove to be nothing short of miraculous. The son will not be sold into slavery; instead both he and his mother will see the redemption of the Compassionate One.

Then the narrative will turn to a season of interaction between Elisha and a woman on the absolute opposite end of the social and economic spectrum – a ‘great’ woman in the Israeli town of Shunem. This woman and her husband were financial supporters of Elisha, with whom he stayed when he was in their area.

As the narrative begins however this couple is childless - and the woman’s husband sterile. Over the course of the passages we read the Holy One will supernaturally bless this couple with a ‘miracle’ son - somewhat as he blessed Avraham and Sarah with Yitzchak. The son of this couple will, after many years, become stricken with illness and die. Through Elisha’s intercession, however, he will be resurrected and returned to his mother and father. Hence what we will witness in this week’s haftarah will be the redemption of two sons.

Look for prophetic parallels, Dear Reader. While Elisha, the widows and their sons were all real people, their stories are included in the text of Scripture because they are symbolic of other things – not to mention which are the Holy One’s dealings with Yish’mael on the one hand, and with Yitzchak on the other, in parsha *Vayera*.

### ***The Apostolic Writings***

II Peter 2:4-11 and Hebrews 11:13-19

For the week of parsha *Vayera* I have selected two separate passages from the writings of Y’shua of *Natzret’s talmidim*. First of all, from Kefa’s second letter I have selected a passage that discusses our purpose in life - to serve as a *royal priesthood*, a *holy nation*, and a *treasured possession* of the Holy One, to show forth His praises. Then, from the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews, I have selected a passage that summarizes – and calls us to - the covenant relationship that existed between Avraham, Sarah, and the Holy One.

*May the Holy One of Israel visit us all this week, Beloved.*

***The Rabbi's son***

***Amidah Prayer Focus For Week #4***

***The 1<sup>st</sup> Petition: Da-at - Understanding***

***Atah chanen l'adam da-at***

*You graciously give man understanding*

***u'm'lamed l'enosh binah***

*and teach mortal men wisdom*

***Chanenu mayitecha da'at, binah, v'haskel***

*Generously endow us with Your understanding, wisdom, and discernment*

***Baruch Atah Adonai, chanen ha-da'at***

*Blessed are You, O Holy One, Who gives understanding*