



Parashat Vayera: From Infertility to Fertility, From Thirst to Life, From Binding to Freedom

Dear Friends,

Last week we read about Avraham as he embarked on his journey to Canaan following the Divine commandment “Lech Lecha”. Great people have the ability to hear that divine calling and dare to listen; to leave all that is familiar, comfortable, and known. In this way, Avraham changed the face of humanity.

Avraham’s greatness was directed by his hearing in the previous parasha, whereas in the current one - Parashat Vayera - the ability to see takes center stage.

Parashat Vayera is full of significant figures in Avraham’s life - Lot, Sarah, Hagar, Yitzchak, and Yishmael - and they all learn to see! They discover that well-developed sight can be the key to salvation. Vayera means: “and he saw”.

At the beginning of the parasha Avraham sees the guests who come to his tent. He sees their angelicness, their divinity. At the end of the parasha he sees the ram caught in the bush, a moment before the sacrifice of Isaac. Most people never see the divine in a person; and they won’t see the ram, which represents an alternate path.

The other partners on the journey also see: Lot, like his uncle, sees guests in need of hospitality; his wife sees S’dom destroyed (and the sight destroys her!); Sarah sees Yishmael and Yitzchak in

some kind of engagement, and Hagar sees the well of water which will save Yishmael.

Our ability to see beyond what is immediately visible - the ram, the well, the guests - is an ability which changes our entire personal story and enables us to transform every situation from one of despair to one of life and growth.

The visible tells us a pessimistic and sisyphian story: a journey from birth to an inevitable end; the journey from flowering to wilting; from fresh beginnings, exciting and dramatic ups and downs in the middle, to an end which is sometimes painful or frail.

The physical-material dimension is totally oblivious to our emotions, our whims, our pain, and our fears.

Parashat Vayera invites us to look further; to truly see - deeply - beyond that which is evident. Our true story is never in the physical or material domain. It may tell us the story of the atoms from which we are comprised, the hormones in our bloodstream, the bacteria in our gut which processes our food, and so on. Their story has bearing upon us, but it isn't OUR story. Our story isn't even the synergy between all of the elements from which we are made.

Our story is not the sum of all the parts that form "us".

No, our story is a direct result of our ability to see consciously and unconsciously, uttered and silent. The wider our vision; the deeper; the more encompassing and clear, the richer our life is.

The big question is - how does one develop such sight?

There are many ways to enrich our vision: exposure to new ideas, art and creativity, emotional healing, to name a few. But all of these methods are based on one important notion: that which is visible - whether sparkling and beautiful or grey and frustrating - is an external veil of reality. The great art is to see beyond it to the essence, to that which forms and sustains it.

Furthermore, the external that we see is not a static fact unrelated to the observer! It, too, is affected by the essence that forms it. Technically, we see with our brain and not with our eyes. Eyes absorb light waves and transfer them to the brain, which translates them into a coherent picture. But if we dig further, we will realize that it isn't our brain that is seeing either. It is our consciousness which converts particles of light into a meaningful image (in truth, all images are meaningful, because it is the meaning that creates the picture). This being so, there is no such thing as seeing objectively. All vision is affected by the organism viewing.

This is why seeing reality - whether the external or the essence from which it is generated - is the result of our understanding, our consciousness, and our thoughts.

This does not by any means imply that a person is to blame for his or her own difficult circumstances, as if his consciousness created it. But neither does he get credit for happy circumstances.

Although we do have significant influence over our reality, most of it is entirely divine grace - the will of the Almighty. That said, the effort we can make to improve the quality of our sight will have a positive effect on our perception of reality, and therefore on reality itself. We will never have complete or even almost-complete power over our lives.

In Parashat Vayera Avraham, Sarah, Lot, Hagar, and Yitzchak all have redeeming vision. Avraham sees the angel in the person before him, thereby earning the blessing of fertility. Sarah sees that it is time to release Hagar and Yishmael from the story. Avraham, the man of grace, learns to "see" the truth in Sarah's tough decision. Hagar, who is banished, sees the well and can envision how her son's story can continue. Lot sees people in distress, and they, in turn, extract him from the hell in which he found himself. Avraham learns to see the anguish in the eyes of his bound son, and sees the alternative - one that that will change the culture of his time: from that point on, children may not be sacrificed!

All of the characters in the parasha learn to see new possibilities that didn't appear to be there previously. Their vision births a new reality: from infertility to parenthood, from thirst to a well of life-giving water, from binding to freedom and life.

In Psalm 121, we are offered the ultimate answer to the life's despair, and it is all about seeing:

Who is the man who seeks life, loves his days, to SEE good!

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha