

**VAYEIRA: ABRAM, SARAI, HAGAR, ISHMAEL AND...EXODUS?**

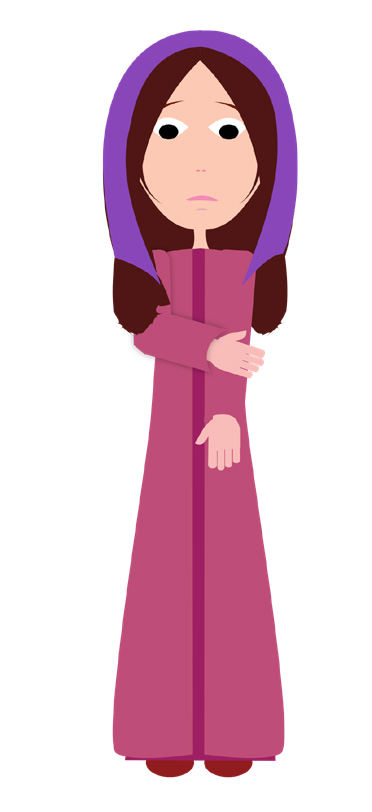
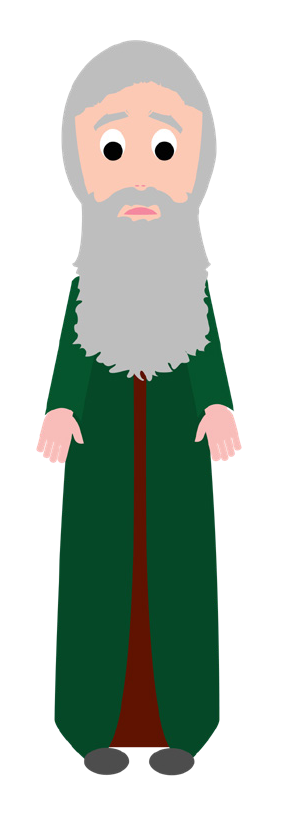
Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Vayeira!

## Learning From Our Forebears

We want to tackle a difficult and painful story: the saga of Abraham, Sarah1, and their maidservant Hagar. In *Parshat Lech Lecha*, the Torah told us that Sarah oppressed Hagar, that she dealt harshly with her.2 And it doesn’t get much better in *Parshat Vayeira*: Sarah wants Hagar thrown out of the house, expelled from the family - and Abraham dutifully obeys.

Hagar and her son Ishmael are cast out of Abraham’s home and they wander in the desert, narrowly escaping death by thirst.3

These stories do not paint our forebears - Abraham and Sarah - in the rosiest of lights. Indeed, the medieval commentator Nachmanides takes them to task for their treatment of Hagar, calling it a sin.4 The question you have to ask is: why is this something the Torah chooses to tell us about? What is the Torah trying to teach us by focusing on this story?



We may be used to seeing our biblical patriarchs and matriarchs as paragons of virtue - and in many ways, that is absolutely true. But we want to raise the possibility that those same patriarchs and matriarchs made mistakes, and that the Torah shares their stories with us so that we can learn from their errors.5 Indeed, in telling the

story of Hagar, the Torah is warning us about something that we - as a nation - need to be especially careful about. For while this story seems like an isolated tale, it has ripple effects throughout the Torah. Let’s take a look at the verses and we’ll see it for ourselves.

## A Curious Connection

The story begins in Genesis Chapter 16, where we are first introduced to Hagar:

**Genesis 16:1-2**

ָצ ַר ִני ְיקוה ִמ ֶּל ֶדת-- ּבא-נא ֶאל- ׁש ְפ ָח ִתי, או ַלי ִא ָּב ֶנה ה ֵּנה-נא ֲע

ׂש ַרי ֶאל-א ְב ָרם,

ָגר. ַו ּתֹא ֶמר ה

ו ָ ׂש ַרי ֵא ׁ ֶשת ַא ְב ָרם, לֹא ָי ְל ָדה ל ֹו; ְו ָל ּה ׁ ִש ְפ ָחה ִמ ְצ ִרית, ּו ׁ ְש ָמ ּה

ׂש ָרי.

לקול

מ ֶּמ ָּנה; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע ַא ְב ָרם,

Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, “Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her.” And Abram heeded Sarai’s request.

1 We use the names “Abraham” and “Sarah” throughout this guide, although they are not technically given those names until Genesis 17.

2 Genesis 16

3 Genesis 21

4 See Nachmanides (Ramban) to Genesis 16:6

5 That being said, perhaps this “sin” of Abraham and Sarah is more subtle than it appears. Rabbi Fohrman explores this possibility in his audio epilogue to the video, “*Vayeira:* Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?”, available at [www.alephbeta.org.](http://www.alephbeta.org/)

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of

Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Vayeira: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

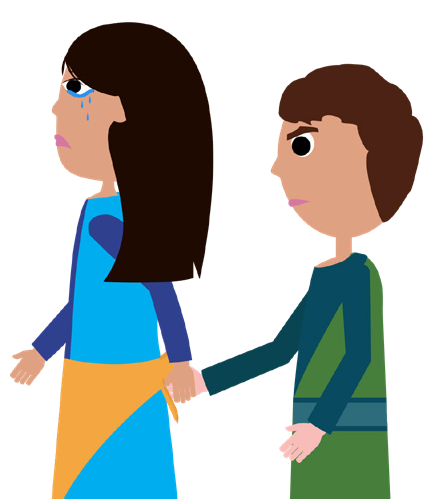
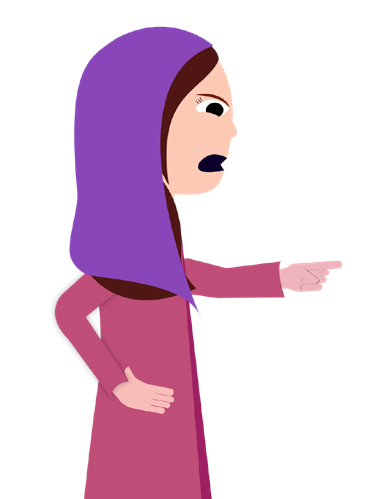
Despairing at her own barrenness and eager to see her husband have a child, Sarah instructs Abraham to marry her maidservant Hagar and have a child with her. But no sooner than Hagar conceives does she begin to disdain her ostensible mistress. Sarah is infuriated by Hagar’s disrespect. She complains to Abraham and he tells her, “Deal with her as you think right.” So what does Sarah do?

**Genesis 16:6**

ׂשרַי, ַו ִּת ְברַח ִמ ָּפ ֶני ָה

##### ו ְּתעַ ֶּנ ָה

And Sarai **oppressed** her, and [Hagar] ran away from her



Note that first word - ָה ֶּנ ְּתעַ ַו (“she oppressed her”). This isn’t the first time we heard about “oppression “ in the Torah. Indeed, if you go back only a dozen verses, we heard about another “oppression.” It was part of the *Brit Bein haBetarim*, the Covenant of the Parts: a prophecy in which God appeared to Abraham and revealed something shocking:

**Genesis 16:6**

ּב ֶא ֶרץ לֹא ָל ֶהם, ַו ֲע ָבד ּום, **ְועִ ּנ ּו** אֹ ָתם--א ְר ַּבע ֵמאות, ׁ ָש ָנה.

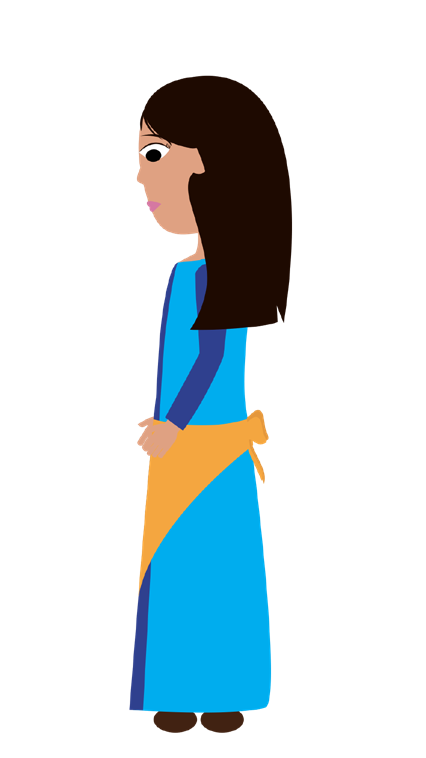
ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך ּכי-גר

ָרם, ָידֹ ַע ֵּת ַדע ל ַא ְב

ו ּיֹא ֶמר

And [God] said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and **oppressed** four hundred years…

Look at that - the same word, only a few verses apart. By using the same word in these two places, it seems like the Torah is trying to draw a connection between the oppression that Hagar experiences and the



oppression that Abraham’s descendants will experience… the oppression of Egyptian servitude.6

Well, isn’t that interesting? God ordains that Abraham’s descendants will toil in Egyptian servitude… and in the very next chapter, we meet an *Egyptian* woman who experiences servitude in Abraham’s house. Two instances of עינוי, oppression: first Abraham’s descendants and now Hagar.

Speaking of which, let’s talk about Hagar’s name. What else does *hey-gimmel-res*h (הגר) spell? It spells ֵּגר הַ (*ha-ger*) - “the stranger.” Does that word ring any bells for you?

**Genesis 15:3**

ֶרץ לֹא ָל ֶהם ּב ֶא

**גֵר** ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך

Your offspring shall be **strangers** in a land not theirs

That was the first part of the prophecy in the *Brit Bein haBetarim*: Abraham’s descendants would be “strangers” in a foreign land, the land of their ultimate oppression - the land of Egypt.

It’s hard to ignore the implications: Hagar felt herself to be a stranger in Abraham’s house. She endured oppression. Now, Abraham’s children would be strangers in Hagar’s “household” - in Egypt. They too would know what it feels like to be oppressed. It seems that right here in Chapter 16 in the Book of Genesis, we’re beginning to get the hints of a gathering storm. Egyptian slavery doesn’t come out of nowhere. There are seeds. This tale with Hagar, the way that Abraham and Sarah treat her: it seems to be one of those seeds.

## Hagar’s Exodus

But wait: are we getting ahead of ourselves? Is there any more evidence that supports this connection between the treatment of Hagar and the Israelites’ experience in Egypt?

As a matter of fact, there is. As you continue to read Hagar’s tale, you find that it is riddled with clues. Consider the tale of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis Chapter 21. Let’s review the verses, and as we do, ask yourself: “What does this story remind you of?”

**Genesis 21:9-10**

ּזֹאת, ִעם- ְב ִני ה

ָא ָמה ּבן-ה

לֹא ִיי ַר ׁש ּכי

ּזֹאת, ְו ֶאת- ְב ָנ ּה: ה

ָא ָמה ה

ְב ָר ָהם, ָּג ֵר ׁש ל ַא

ָר ָהם--מ ַצ ֵחק. ַו ּתֹא ֶמר, ל ַא ְב

ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית, ֲא ׁ ֶשר- ָי ְל ָדה

ׂש ָרה ֶאת- ֶבן-ה ָגר

ו ֵּת ֶרא

ִעם- ִי ְצ ָחק.

Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham making sport. She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

6 Granted, God doesn’t explicitly mention Egypt in the *Brit bein haBetarim*, but if you’ve read the rest of the Torah, you know that that’s how the story ultimately plays out.

Sarah finally gives birth to her own biological child, Isaac - and when he finds Ishmael taunting him, she decides that Ishmael - and Hagar - must go. God concurs, and Abraham wakes up early to send them from the house:

**Genesis 2114-17**

ְּב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע. ַו ִ ּי ְכל ּו ה ַּמ ִים, ִמן-

ְד ַּבר ּב ִמ

ּב ּ ֹב ֶקר ַו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ְו ֵח ַמת ַמ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן ֶאל-ה ָגר ׂשם ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה, ְו ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד--ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּל ֶח ָה; ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ַתע,

ו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ֵּכם ַא ְב ָר ָהם

ה ָ ּי ֶלד; ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ִמ ֶּנ ֶגד, ַו ִּת ָּ ׂשא ֶאת-

ה ִּ ׂשי ִחם. ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ָל ּה ִמ ֶּנ ֶגד, ה ְר ֵחק ּכ ְמ ַט ֲח ֵוי ֶק ׁ ֶשת, ּכי ָא ְמ ָרה, ַאל-א ְר ֶאה ּבמ ֹות

ה ֵח ֶמת; ַו ַּת ׁ ְש ֵל ְך ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד, ַּת ַחת ַא ַחד

ַמע ֱאלֹקים ֶאל-קול ה ַּנ ַער ּכי- ׁש

ָגר; ַאל- ּתי ְר ִאי, ה

קֹ ָל ּה ַו ֵּת ְב ְּך. ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע ֱאלֹקים, ֶאת-קול ה ַּנ ַער, ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ַמ ְל ַא ְך ֱאלֹקים ֶאל-ה ָגר ִמן-ה ׁ ָּש ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָל ּה ַמה- ָּל ְך

ַּב ֲא ׁ ֶשר הוא- ׁשם.

Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them on her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears. God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar?

Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is.”



What does this story remind you of?

Hagar left servitude and entered a forbidden wilderness, a *midbar.* Who else left servitude and entered a *midbar*? That’s what *we* did, as a nation, when we left Egypt - Hagar’s homeland - after all those centuries of slavery. What happened to Hagar when she left? She lost her way; she was just wandering around the desert. What happened to the Israelites when they left Egypt?

**Exodus 14:3**

ה ִּמ ְד ָּבר.

ַגר ֲע ֵלי ֶהם, ס

ָא ֶרץ; ּב

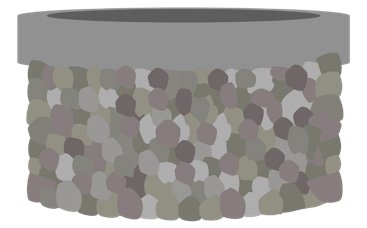
ל ְב ֵני ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל, ְנ ֻב ִכים הם

ו ָא ַמר ַּפ ְרעֹה

Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.”

*We* also got lost in the desert.

What happened next to Hagar? She experienced a water crisis. Her water canteen ran out. She expected that she and her child would die of thirst. But an angel interceded for Hagar and Ishmael, and God pointed the way to a well where they could drink.7 Did anything like that happen to the children



of Israel? It surely did; they too experienced a water crisis. After crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites went three days without any water. But just as Ishmael and Hagar experienced a miraculous relief from their thirst, so too did the Israelites. God instructed Moses to cast a branch into a bitter oasis and the waters became sweet, allowing the people to drink.8

And, back when the angel had interceded for Hagar, he told her:

7 Genesis 21:17-19

8 Exodus 15:22-25

**Genesis 21:17**

אַל- ִּתי ְראִי

Do not fear!

What does Moses tell the people on their way out of Egypt, right before the splitting of the Red Sea?

**Exodus 14:13**

ַאל- ּתי ָראו

Do not fear!

And if you’re still not persuaded that there are bona fide connections here, think back to that moment when Abraham first sent Hagar out of the house:

**Genesis 21:14**

##### ׂשם ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה

ו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ְו ֵח ַמת ַמ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן ֶאל-ה ָגר

And [Abraham] took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them **on her shoulder**

When else do we have someone leaving a place with bread on their shoulders?

**Exodus 12:33-34**

ּב ִ ׂש ְמלֹ ָתם, **ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמם.**

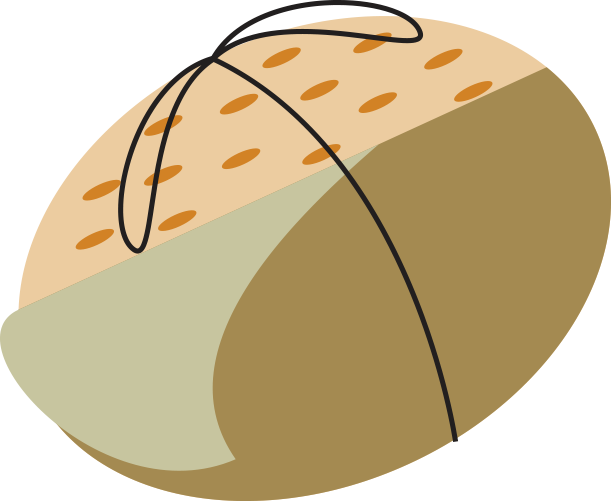
ה ָעם ֶאת- ְב ֵצקו, ֶט ֶרם ֶי ְח ָמץ; ִמ ׁ ְש ֲארֹ ָתם ְצ ֻררֹת

ל ׁ ַש ְּל ָחם ִמן-ה ָא ֶרץ… ַו ִ ּי ָּ ׂשא

ַמ ֵהר ל

ו ֶּת ֱח ַזק ִמ ְצ ַר ִים ַעל-ה ָעם,

The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country… So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks **on their shoulders.**

Bread on their shoulders: that’s how the Israelites carried their matzah when they departed from Egypt, from the house of slavery.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **HAGAR** | **ABRAHAM’S DESCENDANTS** |
| Experiences oppression (עינוי) in Abraham’s household | Experience oppression (עינוי) in Hagar’s “household” (ie Egypt) |
| Name means “the stranger” (גר–ה) | Referred to as “strangers” (גרים) |
| Kicked out into the desert (מדבר) | Kicked out into the desert (מדבר) |
| Gets lost | Get lost |
| Experiences a water crisis | Experience a water crisis |
| Thirst is miraculously quenched | Thirst is miraculously quenched |
| Told not to fear (תיראי אל) | Told not to fear (תיראו אל) |
| Leaves with bread on shoulders | Leaves with bread on shoulders |

## Strangers of Today

In these stories of Hagar and Ishmael, we have the beginning of seeds that come into scary fruition in the Book of Exodus - but seeds that presage our *redemption* as well. Hagar’s experience of oppression: we can hear its echoes in Israelite enslavement, as well as the Exodus from Egypt itself. And the connections don’t end with Egypt. Where else in the Torah do we find mention of הגר (“*ha-ger*”) the stranger?

The answer is: all over the place! Over and over again, the Torah exhorts us to care for the stranger, not to wrong or oppress the stranger - because we *were* strangers, because we know what it feels like.9

In a certain sense, the Exodus from Egypt was all about “us”: the birth of *our* nation, the creation of the Israelites as a distinct and unique entity among peoples. But at the same time, it was the exact opposite: the experience was meant to sensitize us to the plight of the stranger - to those people who don’t quite fit into our nation, who feel like the “other” in our midst. The Torah wanted us to walk out of Egypt with a profound empathy for those who don’t belong. That empathy could have - and should have - begun with the treatment of Hagar.

You see, the Torah is a *guidebook*. It doesn’t just highlight the mistakes of our forefathers and foremothers for no reason; we are meant to actually learn things from these stories.

So what’s the lesson for us today? Even if we can’t remember the last time we threw our maidservant out of our house, we still have strangers in our lives. For one thing, the word *ger* is used to refer to converts. How do we welcome

converts? A *ger* can also be someone who doesn’t share our faith, but is a good and moral person in our midst. How do we treat those people? When you’re walking down the street, do you smile and say “hello” to people who are different than you? Or only to those who are like you?

The Torah doesn’t merely ask that we love our *neighbor* as we love ourselves. It also demands that we love the stranger.

9 For example, see Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 10:19



Vayera: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?

Source Sheet Page 1

##### Genesis 15:13

**13** And [God] said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

**Genesis 16:1-11**

ֶהם, ל

ֶא ֶרץ לֹא ּב

ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך ּכי-גר

מאות, ׁ ָש ָנה.

**בראשית טו:יג**

**יג** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ַא ְב ָרם, ָידֹ ַע ֵת ַדע

ו ֲע ָבד ּום, ְו ִע ּנ ּו אֹ ָתם--א ְר ַּבע

#### בראשית טז:א–יא

**1** Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. **2** And

ה ָגר.

אל-

א ְב ָרם, לֹא ָי ְל ָדה ל ֹו; ְו ָל ּה ׁ ִש ְפ ָחה מ ְצ ִרית, ו ׁ ְש ָמ ּה ְב ָרם, ה ֵּנה-נא ע ָצ ַר ִני ְיקוה מ ֶּל ֶדת-- ּבא-נא אל-א

**א** ְו ָ ׂש ַרי א ׁ ֶשת

**ב** ַו ּתֹא ֶמר ׂש ַרי

Sarai said to Abram, “Look, the LORD has kept me from

לקול ׂש ָרי. **ג** ַו ִּת ַּקח ׂשרַי

מ ֶּמ ָּנה; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע א ְב ָרם,

ָּב ֶנה א

ִש ְפ ָח ִתי, או ַלי

bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a

son through her.” And Abram heeded Sarai’s request. **3** So

ע ֶ ׂשר ׁ ָש ִנים, ל ׁ ֶש ֶבת

את-ה ָגר ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ָת ּה, מ ֵּקץ

א ׁ ֶשת-א ְב ָרם,

Sarai, Abram’s wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—

ל ִא ׁ ָּשה. **ד** וַ ָ ּיבא

ּכ ָנ ַען; ַו ִּת ֵּתן אֹ ָת ּה ל ַא ְב ָרם אי ׁ ָש ּה, ל ֹו

א ְב ָרם ּב ֶא ֶרץ

after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years— and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. **4** He

ַו ֵּת ַקל ְּג ִב ְר ָּת ּה ּב ֵעי ֶני ָה. **ה** ַו ּתֹאמֶר ָנ ַת ִּתי ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ִתי ּב ֵחי ֶק ָך, ַו ֵּת ֶרא ּכי ה ָר ָתה, ע ֶלי ָך--א ֹנ ִכי

אל-ה ָגר, ַו ַּת ַהר; ַו ֵּת ֶרא

ׂש ַרי אל-א ְב ָרם, ח ָמ ִסי

cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she

ֶני ָך. **ו** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר א ְב ָרם ו ֵבי

ּב ֵעי ֶני ָה; ִי ׁ ְש ּ ֹפט ְיקוה, ּבי ִני

ּכי ה ָר ָתה ָו ֵא ַקל

saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in

ּב ָי ֵד ְך--ע ִ ׂשי- ָל ּה, ה ּט ֹוב ּב ֵעי ָנ ִי ְך; ַו ְּת ַע ֶּנ ָה ׂש ַרי,

אל- ָש ַרי, ה ֵּנה ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ֵת ְך

her esteem. **5** And Sarai said to Abram, “The wrong done

ְיקוה, על-עין ה ַּמ ִים-- ַב ִּמ ְד ָּבר: מ ְל ַא ְך

ו ִּת ְב ַרח מִ ָּפ ֶני ָה. **ז** ַו ִ ּי ְמ ָצ ָא ּה

me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now

that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her

על-ה ַע ִין, ּב ֶד ֶר ְך ׁש ּור. **ח** ַו ּיֹא ַמר, ה ָגר ׁ ִש ְפ ַחת ׂש ַרי אי-מ ֶ ּזה באת--

esteem. The LORD decide between you and me!” **6** Abram

ּה ל

ת ֵל ִכי; ַו ּתֹא ֶמר--מ ְּפ ֵני ׂש ַרי ְּג ִב ְר ִּתי, א ֹנ ִכי ֹב ַר ַחת. **ט** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר

ו ָא ָנה

said to Sarai, “Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right.” Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she

ּה ל

ׁש ּו ִבי אל- ְג ִב ְר ֵּת ְך, ְו ִה ְת ַע ִּני, ַת ַחת ָי ֶדי ָה. **י** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ּה ְר ָּבה א ְר ֶּבה את-ז ְר ֵע ְך, ְולֹא ִי ָּס ֵפר, מ ֹרב. **יא** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, ה

ran away from her. **7** An angel of the LORD found her by a

ה ָרה ְויֹ ַל ְד ְּת ּבן, ְו ָק ָראת ׁ ְשמ ֹו ִי ׁ ְש ָמ ֵעאל, ּכי- ׁש ַמע

מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, ה ָּנ ְך

spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, **8** and said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” And she said, “I am running away from my mistress Sarai.” **9** And the angel

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of the LORD said to her, “Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment.” **10** And the angel of the LORD said to her, “I will greatly increase your offspring, And they shall be too many to count.” **11** The angel of the LORD said to her further, “Behold, you are with child And shall bear a son; You shall call him Ishmael, For the LORD has paid heed to your suffering.

##### Nachmanides on Genesis 16:6

**And Sarai oppressed her and she fled from her presence (literally “face”):** Our mother sinned in this oppression, and also Abraham in permitting her to do so. And Hashem heard her [Hagar’s] oppression and gave her a son who would be a wild ass of a man to oppress the descendants of Abraham and Sarah in all kinds of oppression.

**Genesis 21:9–19**

#### רמב”ן על בראשית טז:ו

**ותענה שרי ותברח מפניה** - חטאה אמנו בענוי הזה וגם אברהם

בהניחו לעשות כן ושמע ה’ אל עניה ונתן לה בן שיהא פרא אדם

לענות זרע אברהם ושרה בכל מיני הענוי

#### בראשית כא:ט–יט

**9** Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne

ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית, א ׁ ֶשר- ָי ְל ָדה ל ַא ְב ָר ָהם--מ ַצ ֵחק.

ׂש ָרה את- ֶבן-ה ָגר

**ט** ַו ֵּת ֶרא

to Abraham playing. **10** She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave

ָּג ֵר ׁש ה ָא ָמה ה ּזֹאת, ְו ֶאת- ְב ָנ ּה: ּכי לֹא ִיי ַר ׁש ְב ִני עם- ִי ְצ ָחק. **יא** ַו ֵ ּי ַרע ה ָ ּד ָבר מאֹד, ּב ֵעי ֵני ל ַא ְב ָר ָהם, ה ּזֹאת, עם-

**י** ַו ּתֹא ֶמר,

ּבן-ה ָא ָמה

shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.” **11**

The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. **12** But God said to Abraham, “Do not be

distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring

ָהם, על, אודֹת ּבנ ֹו. **יב** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר אלֹקים אל-א ְב ָר ָהם, אל- ֵי ַרע ָך על-ה ַּנ ַער ְו ַעל-א ָמ ֶת ָך-- ּכל א ׁ ֶשר תֹא ַמר א ֶלי ָך ׂש ָרה, ׁ ְש ַמע א ְב ָר ִי ְצ ָחק, ִי ָּק ֵרא ל ָך ָז ַרע. **יג** ְו ַגם את- ֶבן-ה ָא ָמה, לג ֹוי ּב ֵעי ֶני ַז ְר ֲע ָך, הוא. **יד** ַו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ֵּכם א ְב ָר ָהם ּב ּ ֹב ֶקר ַו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ּבקֹ ָל ּה: ּכי ב א ִ ׂשי ֶמ ּנ ּו: ּכי

shall be continued for you. **13** As for the son of the slave-

אל-ה ָגר ׂשם על- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה, ְו ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד--ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּל ֶח ָה;

ו ֵח ַמת מ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן

woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed.” **14** Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. **15** When the water was gone from the skin,

ו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ַתע, ּב ִמ ְד ַּבר ּב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע. **טו** ַו ִ ּי ְכל ּו ה ַּמ ִים, מן-ה ֵח ֶמת;

ו ַּת ׁ ְש ֵל ְך את-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד, ַת ַחת א ַחד ה ִּ ׂשי ִחם. **טז** ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ל ּה מ ֶּנ ֶגד, ה ְר ֵחק ּכ ְמ ַט ֲח ֵוי ֶק ׁ ֶשת, ּכי א ְמ ָרה, אל-א ְר ֶאה ּבמ ֹות ה ָ ּי ֶלד; ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב

מ ֶּנ ֶגד, ַו ִּת ָּ ׂשא את-קֹ ָל ּה ַו ֵּת ְב ְּך. **יז** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע אלֹקים, את-קול ה ַּנ ַער,

ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא מ ְל ַא ְך אלֹקים אל-ה ָגר מן-ה ׁ ָּש ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ּה מה- ָּל ְך ה ָגר;

she left the child under one of the bushes, **16** and went

ּב ֲא ׁ ֶשר הוא- ׁשם. **יח**

ה ַּנ ַער אל-קול

ׁש ַמע אלֹקים ּכי-

אל- ּתי ְר ִאי,

and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she

את- ָי ֵד ְך ב ֹו: ּכי- ְלג ֹוי ָּגד ֹול, א ִ ׂשי ֶמ ּנ ּו.

ַּנ ַער, ְו ַה ֲח ִזי ִקי את-ה

קו ִמי ׂש ִאי

thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting

ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ְּת ַמ ֵּלא את- מ ִים; ַו

ֵאר ּב

**יט** ַו ִ ּי ְפ ַקח אלֹקים את-עי ֶני ָה, ַו ֵּת ֶרא

thus afar, she burst into tears. **17** God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. **18** Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great

מ ִים, ַו ַּת ׁ ְש ְק, את-ה ָּנ ַער.

ה ֵח ֶמת,



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nation of him.” **19** Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink.

##### Exodus 12:34

**34** So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders.

**Exodus 14:3**

ּב ִ ׂש ְמלֹ ָתם,

צ ֻררֹת

מ ׁ ְש ֲארֹ ָתם

ֶרם ֶי ְח ָמץ; ט

ְב ֵצקו, את-

#### שמות יב:לד

**לד** ַו ִ ּי ָּ ׂשא ה ָעם

ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמם.

#### שמות יד:ג

**3** Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.”

ִּמ ְד ָּבר. ה

ֵלי ֶהם, ע

ס ַגר

ָא ֶרץ; ּב

ל ְב ֵני ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל, ְנ ֻב ִכים הם

ְרעֹה ַפ

**ג** ְו ָא ַמר

##### Exodus 14:13

**13** But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by,

את- ְי ׁש ּו ַעת ו ְראו

אל-ה ָעם, אל- ּתי ָראו--ה ְת ַי ְ ּצב ּו

#### שמות יד:יג

**יג** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר מֹ ׁ ֶשה

and witness the deliverance which the LORD will work for

ְצ ַר ִים ה ּי ֹום-- את-מ

ה ּי ֹום: ּכי, א ׁ ֶשר ְר ִאי ֶתם

יקוה, א ׁ ֶשר- ַי ֲע ֶ ׂשה ל ֶכם

you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again.

ֹו ָלם. עד-ע

ְראֹ ָתם ע ֹוד, ל

לֹא תֹ ִספו

**Exodus 23:9**

#### שמות כג:ט

**9** You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the

ִיי ֶתם, ה

ֵּגר-- ִכי-ג ִרים ה

ֶפ ׁש את-נ

ְו ֵגר, לֹא ת ְל ָחץ; ְו ַא ֶּתם, ְי ַד ְע ֶּתם **ט**

feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

מ ְצרָ ִים.

ּב ֶארֶץ

**Deuteronomy 10:19**

#### דברים י:יט

**19** You must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

ְצ ָר ִים. מ

ֶא ֶרץ ּב

ִיי ֶתם, ה

ִרים ּכי-ג

ֵּגר: את-ה

**יט** ו ֲא ַה ְב ֶּתם,

Hi everybody, this is Rabbi David Fohrman and this is a little audio epilogue which I wanted to put together to you that follows our regular Parshat Vayeira video, so if you haven't seen that, go take a look there. But I want to come back with you now into the very difficult and painful stories that we began to look at.

In this week's parsha, Hagar is expelled from the household along with her child Yishmael. In last week's parsha, Hagar was oppressed by Sarai and she ran away. These are painful and difficult stories. The Ramban, the great medieval commentator in writing about these stories, suggest that Sarai and Avram were guilty of a terrible sin. The Ramban suggests that there were significant consequences that echoed through the course of history as a result of this oppression. The child of Hagar, Yishmael - in the Ramban's view - would become something of a thorn in the side of the children of Isaac. There would be a kind of historical enmity here which would come back to haunt the children of Isaac.

Let's take a closer look at these stories, because frankly Sarai's behavior just seems so inexplicable. I mean here is a woman that we revere and it just seems like she lost it, but that's a terrible thing. The Ramban does say this was a terrible thing, but is there any way of understanding at least from Sarai's perspective, what was happening here? Was it really just as simple as getting yourself caught up in anger and spinning out of control? I don't think that's what the text suggests. I think to understand more deeply what was going on here, we really need to go back to some of the themes which we were talking about last week.

Last week I suggested to you that there is a central theme that winds itself throughout all of the Abraham stories, the glue that makes all of the Avram stories stick together and make them one large story. That is the theme of legacy; who will be the child of Abraham? Because it's not even clear that he will have a biological child in the beginning. He's going to be the father of a great nation, as I suggested last week, could be he's going to be George Washington. How is this great promise of nationhood - that this great nation that's going to come from Abraham - how is it actually going to come to fruition? This is the question that Avram struggles with.

I think it's against this backdrop that you need to examine the story of Hagar. It's not a coincidence that Sarai is oppressing Hagar, it's part of this great, epic, developing story. The question of who Avram's child will really be.

Immediately before the oppression of Hagar was that Abraham found out something momentous. Chapter 15 in last week's Parsha begins with these words; Acharei [Achar 2:40] hadevarim ha'eileh - after these things. After what things? The very last thing that happened. After Abraham left Lot for the last time, Lot goes with the King of Sodom, and his only biological connection to the next generation is gone. At that point G-d comes to him in a dream and says; Onochi magen lach secharcha harbeh me'od

- I'm going to be your shield, I'm going to give you all of this great, great reward. I'm so impressed with you. Avram says, G-d: Mah titen li - what can you possibly give me? Onochi holech ariri - I don't even have any children. Ben messek beiti damessek Eliezer - all I have now is my servant. Am I down to my servant Eliezer? Who is it going to be? Where is this nation going to come from?

There's this silence, this pause. So Avram begins speaking again. Va'yomer Avram - and Avram says the same thing. Hein li lo natatah zerah - You didn't give me any children. Hinei ben beiti yoresh oti - is it really going to be my servant? At that point G-d responds and tells him something. Avram has pressed the point twice and G-d responds and says; Lo yirashcha zeh - he will not be the one to inherit you.

Asher yetzei mimei'echa hu yirashecha - you're going to have a biological child. It's the first time G-d is explicit about this with Abraham. Here he is, he and his wife they're advanced in years and it's really going to happen, Avram is going to have a biological child.

Is it a coincidence that in the very next story it begins that Sarai the wife of Avram she didn't have any children, but she had an Egyptian maidservant, a woman by the name of Hagar. Sarai says to Avram; Hinei nah azarani Hashem miledet - G-d has apparently held me back from having children. Bo nah el shifchati - consort with my maidservant. Ulai iboneh mimenah - maybe I can be built up through her. Avram listened to the voice of Sarai and did this.

What's going on? There was just a prophecy that they would have children, right? So why is she saying, G-d has held me back from having children, does she not believe? But look carefully. The prophecy was never that she would have children, that wasn't the language, and this in fact is how Rashi interprets it. That Sarai saw in the promise a promise for Avram, but did not necessarily see that she was included in this, and she jumped to conclusions. G-d has apparently withheld me from having children, so you're going to have this great child but who is it going to be with? Let me at least have some hand in this. If the woman who becomes the mother of this child is at least my maidservant, subservient to me, then at least I can raise the child, I can have a hand in this.

So Avram marries Hagar. Hagar becomes pregnant, and once she becomes pregnant she starts treating Sarah lightly and that is what causes Sarai to oppress her. Sarai is not just a scorned woman who can't reign in her emotions. What's the import of Hagar treating Sarai lightly? Hagar is saying, I'm not subservient to you anymore. What does that mean for the child? It means Sarai is not going to raise that child. It's like the Torah is discussing a case of surrogate motherhood over here. I'm not going to have a child for you. What's the whole question with surrogate motherhood? What happens when the biological mother wants to keep the child? Well that's Hagar. I'm not subservient to you anymore, it's my child.

At that point the whole plan goes down the drain and you hear it in Rashi's words explaining Sarai's bitterness. A bitterness the text says is her bitterness to Abraham her husband. Chamasi alecha - my anger is kindled against you. Rashi explains, what did he do wrong? It wasn't something he did now, yeah he listened to her now, but what about earlier, when you prayed G-d in the last chapter? When you said,

* 1. what can You give me, I don't have any children. You shouldn't have said what can you give me, I don't have any children, you should have said, what about us? What can You give us? Then, as Rashi says; Vehayiti ani nifkedet imcha - then I would have been answered along with you.

Now this was one last desperate role of the dice, it didn't work out, Sarai oppresses Hagar in an attempt to reassert the mistress/servant relationship, so that the child would be hers. But the attempt fails. Hagar

runs away.

So coming back to the Ramban, there is a sin here, a terrible sin, a sin that doesn't come out of nowhere. It's not just emotions out of control, it's a desperate attempt to control a situation, to control who is going to be this child? How will this nation, this great nation promised by G-d come about? The question of legacy poses the central challenge in the lives of Avram and Sarai. This is a moment when that challenge leads to a terrible error in judgment, Sarai's oppression of Hagar and Avram's allowing that oppression to take place.

Hi, it's Rabbi David Fohrman. You are watching AlephBeta and this is Parshat Vayeira. This week, I want to deal with a painful and difficult story that begins in last week's Parsha and continues in this week's parsha. It's the story of Abraham and Sarai and their difficult interaction, with Hagar and her son, Ishmael.

# The Painful

Story of

# Hagar, Ishmael, Abraham and Sarah

Last week's Parsha involves Hagar, this Egyptian maid servant of Sarai, who actually becomes the mother of Abraham's first child, Ishmael. And while she is pregnant with that child, “vate'aneha Sarai”, Sarai oppressed her, “vativrach mipaneiha”, and she ran away from her. And it doesn't get much better in this week's parsha. Hagar is expelled from the family, Sarai insists on it, God concurs and Abraham does it.

But again, another difficult and painful story, and the commentators view it as a difficult and painful story. Nachmanides, for example, takes Sarai for the task and Avraham for the oppression of Hagar, calls it a sin. Why is the Bible focusing on these sins?

I think one answer goes back to an idea I shared with you back in Parshat Noach about the Torah being a guidebook - it's telling history from the perspective of guiding you. And if you are being guided, it may well be that the Torah seeks to guide us by highlighting the sins of our ancestors as a way of letting us know what it is that we need to be careful about as a nation. At least, that's a possibility. And if that's true, it’s possible that Sarai's sin was more subtle than might be gleaned by looking at this text at first glance. I've actually composed an audio epilogue that really takes a look carefully at the nuances in the text, and I think a story behind the story emerges as to what was going on in Sarai and Abraham's head. But for the meantime, I want to take you on a little journey – a journey through words. Because I think these stories about the interaction of Abraham, Sarai and Hagar are not little local stories, they are the beginning of an epic story, and I want to pick up the threads with you and see if we can see where they lead.

# Studying The Bible

Story

# Of Hagar

Let's start with last week's Parsha, the introductory verse into the interaction with Hagar. “VeSarai eshet Avram lo yaledah lo velah shifchah Mitzrit ushmah Hagar”, and Sarai didn't have a child but she did have an Egyptian maidservant by the name of Hagar. Now Let me ask you a question: Why does the Torah have to go out of its way to let you know Hagar's nationality? Who cares about that? And now, let's talk about context a little bit. Remember how this story takes place right after that prophetic moment when Abraham was first told that he was going to have a biological child? Well, something else happened at that prophetic moment, too - a dark, prophetic nightmare, through which Abraham found out shocking news. “Ger yihyeh zar'acha be'eretz lo lahem va'avadum ve'inu otam arba me'ot shanah”, your children are going to find themselves strangers in a land not their own, and the inhabitants of that land will enslave them for 400 years." We, at this point in Genesis, don't know what that land will be. But of course, it refers to Egyptian servitude - Abraham's children will be gerim, strangers, in another household and they will be enslaved in Egypt.

Isn't it interesting? We meet a woman who is a servant in Abraham's household, and what happens to her? The verb that she experiences as 'oppression' in Hebrew, “inui”, the very same verb that God says Abraham's children are going to experience when they are enslaved in someone else's household. But we know who's household it ends up being, right? Egypt! Well, isn't it very interesting that the Torah gives us the nationality of this maidservant who is oppressed in Abraham's household? She was Egyptian!

# The Meaning Of Hagar's Name

And now, let's talk about her name. What does hey-gimel-resh spell to you? “Hager” - the stranger! “Ger yihyeh zar'acha be'eretz lo lahem”, your children will be strangers in someone else's house. You had Hagar who felt her herself to be a stranger in your house, she suffered oppression, and now your children will feel oppression for 400 years in Egypt's household. It seems that right here in Chapter 16 in [Book of](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/genesis) [Genesis](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/genesis), we're beginning to get the hints of a gathering storm. Egyptian slavery doesn't come out of nowhere - there are seeds, and this seems to be one of the seeds.

Okay, now let's stop for just a minute. Maybe at this point, you sit back and you say, "You know, Rabbi Fohrman, that's really interesting. But could this really be true? Is there any more evidence that supports this? I don't really buy this!" Well, as a matter of fact, there is really more evidence and it's in this week's Parsha - the story of the expulsion of Ishmael and Hagar.

# The

Exodus

# Precursor?

Abraham Casts Out Hagar and Ishmael

# into the Wilderness

Ishmael was taunting young Isaac; the rivalry was spilling into the next generation. Sarai comes to the conclusion that it must stop, Hagar must leave. Abraham wakes up in the morning, “vayikach lechem vechemat mayim”, he gives her bread and some water; “vayiten el-Hagar”, he gives it to Hagar, “sam al- shichmah”, he places it on her shoulder and she goes. “Vatelech vateta bemidbar Be'er-sheva”, and in the desert, she gets lost, confused. The water in the canteen runs out, she casts Ishmael down beneath some bramble branches; she situates herself a distance away, and she lifts up her voice, she cries - she expects her child to die.

A miracle occurs! An angel comes, tells her, “al-tire'i”, do not fear, Hagar. “Ki-legoy gadol asimenu”, I will make your child into a great nation. Hagar opens her eyes; miraculously, there is a well there. She gives water to the child and he lives, and her journey through the desert goes on. What does this story remind you of?

Hagar left servitude and entered a forbidden desert. Who else leaves servitude and enters into a desert? Oh! That's what we do, as a nation. When we leave Egypt, Hagar's homeland, after those centuries of slavery promised to Abraham. We leave and enter into a desert, into a midbar. It's the very same word, midbar, which was used to describe the place that Hagar went. What happened to Hagar when she left? She lost her way; she was just wandering around the dessert. What happened to the nation of Israel just after they leave? “Va'amar Paroh livenei Yisrael”, and Pharaoh will say about the Jewish people, God says,

“nevuchim hem baaretz”, the people are confused, they are lost in the desert. “Sagar aleihem hamidbar”, the desert has swallowed them up! So, Hagar gets lost in the desert and God orchestrates things. So, it seems that the Jews get lost in the desert.

What happened next to Hagar? She experiences a water crisis. And guess what? As we appeared to wander into the desert, we, the nation of Israel, experience two water crisis. As the Egyptians closed in, our backs were to a wall of water – the Red Sea was behind us. Immediately after the Red Sea, the Jews go three days and they can't find water and they’re dying of thirst. One water crisis for them, two for us.

Divine intervention protected Hagar; divine intervention protects us. The sea splits, and just as Hagar and Ishmael experience a miraculous relief from thirst, so do we, as Moses throws a branch in a bitter oasis of water to sweeten the water so that we all can drink. And lest you think it is a coincidence, when an angel intercede to protect Hagar and Ishmael, He tells her, “al-tire'i”, do not fear, Hagar! What is it that Moses say to the Jews, right before the miracle at the water of the Red Sea? “Al-tira'u”, do not fear! It's the same words.

And speaking of the same words, as Abraham sends out Hagar, he gives her bread, “ve-sam al-shichmah”, and places it on her shoulder. When else do we have someone leaving, placing bread on their shoulders? Chapter 12, Verse 34 - the people took their dough even before it could rise; “tsrurot besimlotam al- shichmam”, tied up in their clothes, placed on their shoulders. Bread on your shoulders, as you leave. It's how we took our matza with us as we left Egypt, our house of slavery.

# The

Lesson

# Behind Abraham & Hagar's

Story

In these stories of Hagar and Ishmael, we have the beginning of seeds that come into scary fruition in the [Book of Exodus](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/exodus). But seeds that presage our redemption as well. The Torah is a guidebook; it doesn't just highlight the mistakes of our fathers and mothers for no reason. We are meant to actually learn things from these stories. What are we meant to learn here?

As we leave Egypt, what is one of the expectations that we hear over and over, and over, again? “Ve'ahavta et hager”, love the stranger; “v'ger lo toneh”, don't wrong the stranger; “ki-gerim hayitem be'eretz Mitzrayim”, you know what it's like to be a stranger; you were a stranger in Egypt! The Torah wants us to walk out of Egypt with a sensitivity towards people who feel like the other in our midst. The Exodus of Egypt, after all, was the birth of a nation. A nation means us – people like us… but what about them? The people who are strangers, who don't belong? We still have strangers in our lives today.

There's all kinds of gerim. It's a word used for a convert - how do we welcome converts? And there are other kinds of strangers. Do you have a housekeeper at home? How do you treat them? It's a word used for people who don't share our faith – there are good, moral people who live in our midst too. How do we treat them? You're walking down the street, do you only say 'hello' to people you know? Or, will you smile at one of the people who seem so different from you who’s walking towards you? It's not just "ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocha", love your neighbour as yourself for the Torah - it's also “ve'ahavtem et hager”, love the stranger, too.



**PARSHAT VAYEIRA: SODOM, CITY OF…JUSTICE?**

This outline corresponds to the video: [Sodom, City of… Justice?](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/real-sin-of-sodom-gomorrah)

**SABBATH TABLE OUTLINE**

* + 1. The Key to an Ancient Puzzle: What Was the Real Sin of Sedom?
       1. This week’s parsha contains a solution to a great mystery – a puzzle whose origins take us back to the Garden of Eden itself.
       2. As Adam and Eve were being banished from Eden, the verse tells us that God ensconced special angels at the entrance of the Garden.
          1. They were there to stand guard.
          2. But the cherubs weren’t just there to guard the Garden in general; their interest was in a very particular part of the Garden

Guide by Dr. Sarah Levy

* + - 1. So, not only does the Garden of Eden contain a mysterious Tree of Life – but, we learn in this verse, it

also, apparently, contains a pathway– a pathway that leads right to that special tree.

* + - * 1. What is the meaning of this pathway?
        2. Was it a yellow brick road or something?
        3. A gravel path adorned with an attractive sign: ‘This way to the Tree of Life?’
      1. A path seems like a way of gaining access to the thing that lies at the end. So does the mystery of how to access the Tree of Life lie, somehow, in this path?
    1. Where Do We Hear These Words Again?
       1. Parshat Vayeira seems to illuminate the nature of this elusive pathway.
          1. Go back to Eden for a minute, back to that verse

we just looked at – the passage that describes mankind’s banishment from the Garden – and ask: Where else do we hear these words?

* + - * 1. Going to look at these ‘banishment from Eden’ verses, and going to highlight eight peculiarities in that text.
        2. Want you to ask yourself: where else in the Bible do we meet a story that contains all eight of these elements?
    1. Sending a Hand, Sending a Person
       1. And the LORD God said, “Now mankind has become like one of us, knowing good and bad; and now, perhaps he will stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life

טוֹב ָו ָ ֑רע ְו ַﬠ ָ ֣תּה ׀ - forever!” live and eat, and

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* + - * 1. Ok, so right there is the first element: the word shalach paired with the word yad; the stretching out of a person’s hand, in order to grab something.



* + - 1. So the LORD God sent him from the garden of Eden, to work the land from which he was

מ ָֽשּׁם׃ - taken.

ל ַ ֖קּח

א ֶ ֥שׁר

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* + 1. The Garden

1. Someone being sent out of the place they are living. That’s element number two.
   1. The next element adds more specificity to the place which the person is being sent from.
      1. In our original story that place was ֶדן ﬠ֑ ֵ ן־גַּ ִמ, from the Garden of Eden. And, in the other story I’m thinking about – the place from which someone is sent – it just happens to be a garden, too.
      2. That’s element number 3. A garden.
   2. Next in the Eden narrative we arrive at the verse we talked about just a minute ago: He drove the man out, and stationed, east of the garden of Eden, these angels called

ַה ְכּ ֻר ִ֗ביםcherubs… את־

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ֶ֨קּ ֶדם מ

את־ ָֽה ָא ָ ֑דם ַוַיּ ְשׁ ֵכּ ֩ן

וי ָ ֖ג  ֶרשׁ

* + 1. Well, in the other story I’m thinking about, guess what? We also meet angels.
    2. Angels: Element number 4.
  1. So, back in Eden, just where were those angels?
     1. The verse says they were stationed ֶדן ﬠֵ ֜ ַגן־ ל that other story I’m

thinking about – we also have that very same direction pointer:

The

word ‘mikedem’, from the east.

* + 1. That’s element number 5.
  1. And, picking up again in our

ֶדם קֶּ֨ ִמ. Well, wouldn’t you know it? In

Eden story – those angels in the east, it turns out they were holding something: A flaming sword. Special, divine fire.

* + 1. Well, the story I’m thinking about also has special, divine fire in it, too.
    2. Divine Flames: Element number 6.
  1. Back to Eden, that flaming sword the angels were holding – the Torah tells us something unusual about it.
     1. The sword was ֶכת פֶּ ֔ ַה ְת מִּ. That word literally means ‘turned over’ or ‘reversed.’ The sword seems to have been turning around, somehow.
     2. And it just so happens that this word, mit’hapechet – that shows up in the other story I’m thinking about, too: That story, too, is about something that gets turned around, or turned over.
     3. That’s element number 7: Mit’hapechet.
  2. So folks, I’m going to hold back for a minute on the promised eighth element for a minute – but we’ve got enough to go on here for the meantime. Let’s get to the $64,000 question: What other story has all these elements?
     1. Shalach yad – sending out your hand to grab something, followed by just ‘shalach’ – sending someone out of their home.
     2. The word Mikedem.



* + 1. A garden.
    2. Angels.
    3. Fire.
    4. Mithapechet.
  1. What other story has got, not just some of these elements, but all of them?
     1. Introducing the Story of Sedom & Gomorrah
        1. Well… Welcome to this week’s parsha. The other story is the destruction of Sedom. And yeah – all eight elements.
           1. Sending out a hand to grab something? Check. That’s the angels, they are in Sedom with Lot, and the mob approaches them, the mob is seeking to molest the guests Lot has brought in his house.

and hand’ their out ‘send angels the , ִויּ ְשׁ ְל ֤חוּ ֽ ָה ֲא ָנ ִשׁי ֙ם את־ָיָ֔דם moment, that At ii.

grab Lot, they save his life.

1. Right after that, Lot gets ‘sent’ from the city: ֙ט וֶֹאת־ל

**וישׁ ַ ֤לּח**

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ה ֲה ֵפ ֔ ָכה

֣ßוֹתּ ִמ

– God remembers Abraham and sends Lot from the destruction.

1. What about a garden? Well, back when Lot first settled in Sedom, the Torah just happens to mention that Sedom was kegan hashem, like the Garden of Eden itself It was a very lush and fertile area with a river running through it.
2. Mikedem? Yup, got that too. When Lot chooses to settle in Sedom in the first place, we hear “vayisa Lot mikedem” – Lot travels from the East…
3. Next element: Angels? Well, we’ve got that: Of course, the angels come to destroy Sedom.
4. And special, divine fire? Oh yeah, Sedom has plenty of that. It is destroyed through divine fire, raining down from heaven.
5. What verb does the Torah use to describe that destruction? You might have guessed it: The same verb as that rotating sword back in

**ַה ֲה ֵפ ֔ ָכה** mit’hapechet: Eden,

ßוֹתּ֣ מ

֙ט את־לוֹ

שׁ ַ ֤לּח

ְוי **.** And Lot was sent out from the

destruction. But the word for destruction is haphechah, literally: “turned-over- ness.”

* + 1. The Sinful Path to Sedom
       1. So… we’ve seen seven parallel elements thus far. We will get to the eighth in a moment – but I just want to stop here for a minute and ask you what you think the meaning is of that which we have seen thus far?
          1. It certainly seems like the story of Adam’s banishment from Eden is getting paralleled in an eerie kind of way by this week’s story of the destruction of Sedom.
          2. But I want to ask why the Torah would do that? What are we meant to learn from it?
       2. That is a very good question. I want to hazard a guess.
          1. Broadly speaking, how would you say we might summarize the similarity between these stories?



* + - * 1. Well, in both stories, we are looking at the loss of a garden. The first is a Divine Garden, God’s special place on earth.
        2. The second is a more mundane place – the fertile plain of the Jordan valley, the place where Sedom was situated – a paradisaical, lush setting, perfect for growing wonderful crops. In each story, the inhabitants commit some sort of sin, and lose access to the garden.
      1. Okay so that’s the basic similarities between the stories. But beyond that there are some important contrasts between these two stories.
         1. In the first story, in Eden, Adam and Eve, they lose access to the garden – but neither they nor the garden are destroyed.
         2. In the Sedom story, though, God goes further. Both the inhabitants, and the garden, perish.
      2. It seems that we are looking at a kind of progression here.
         1. The eating of the forbidden fruit, that was a first step along a dark and dangerous path – a path whose possible end state is Sedom.
         2. In other words: If people don’t disabuse themselves of the evil values they expressed by reaching for that fruit, they risk the possibility that some time in the future, these evil values will give rise to an entire society that institutionalizes these values.
         3. If that would ever happen, the society itself would need to be destroyed.
    1. What Was the Real Sin of Sedom & Gomorrah?
       1. The people of Sedom, they weren’t just bad; they institutionalized evil; they built it into their system of law.
       2. The mob that converged on Lot’s door that sought to molest his guests – the text describes them as ‘young and old, from one part of society to the other.’ A strange demographic, wouldn’t you say?
       3. It doesn’t seem like the mob was motivated by lust, they were motivated by civic duty.
          1. This was a mass, civic, protest on Lot’s lawn, because… Lot broke the rules. Sedom; it was the original gated community – and, as the Ramban writes, the rules were: We

keep guests out of our little, paradisiacal, place, by raping and robbing them. The Sedomites, they institutionalized evil.

* + - * 1. Ultimately, there is no place in the world for a society like that. Both the garden and the inhabitants have got to go.
    1. The Eighth Parallel
       1. But if the parallels we have seen suggest the existence of a dark path, perhaps they also suggest the existence of another kind of path. A wonderful path. And this brings us straight to the eighth parallel between these stories.



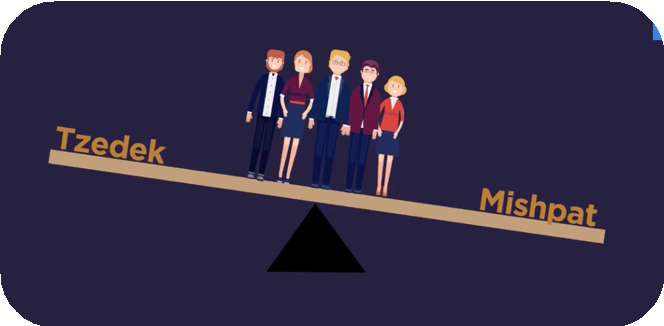
* + - 1. You can see the eighth parallel if you keep just keep reading the Eden story – after we read of the angels, with their fire, and the sword that is mit’hapechet… after that, we hear one last thing. We hear about the purpose of the angels.
         1. and the fiery ever-turning sword, to **guard the path** of the tree of life. - **ֹמר ֕ שְׁ ִל**

**ֶאת־ ֶ ֖דּ ֶרG** ﬠץ ֽה ַחִֽיּים׃

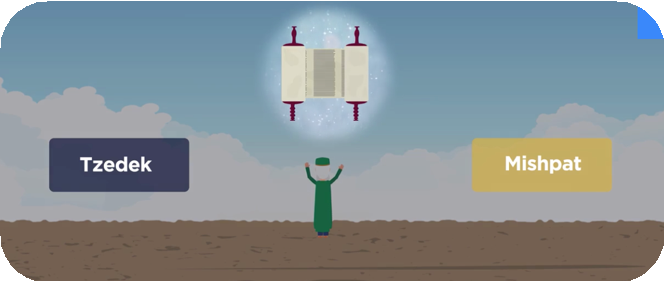
* + - * 1. That same language, ‘lishmor derech’, appears in the Sedom story. Guess where?
    1. Abraham’s Mission
       1. That expression appears right before God decides to destroy Sedom. At that particular moment in time, God chooses to consult Abraham about the Lord’s plans. And then, in a narrative aside, God tells us why He’s even bothering to consult Abraham about His plans
       2. There it is: lishmor derech in the Sedom story. Keeping or guarding the path back to the tree of life, somehow gets mirrored in Sedom by Abraham’s keeping the path of God … to do tzedek and mishpat: What is right and what is just.
          1. Fascinating! Earlier, back in Parshat Bereishit, I talked to you about how cherubs, they appear

twice in the Five Books of Moses, once, where they guard the original tree of life, and once more, when they guard the Ten Commandments – the Torah – which, interestingly enough,

is described in Proverbs as a Tree of Life.

* + - * 1. So, add it all up: these cherubs, they always end up guarding some sort of Tree of Life.
      1. But if the Torah is a tree of life, we now see that this tree so to speak, comes with a path – a path you can walk on. What is that path? L’asot Tzedaka U’mishpat. It is the path of tzedek and mishpat. The right thing to do and the just thing to do.
         1. The just thing to do and the right thing to do. How fascinating.
         2. We often think these two are synonyms. They kind of mean the same thing.
         3. But I want to suggest that they are actually not the same thing at all. They are actually in tension with each other.
      2. There’s two values here. They are the two building blocks of any virtuous society. Both values are crucial – Tzedek and Mishpat – and the tension between them defines exactly what kind of a society you’re really going to have.



* + 1. What Makes an Ideal Society?
       1. Stand back and imagine the perfect society, and then ask yourself: Why is it good to live there? invariably, you will find yourself giving an answer, that will take you back to tzedek and mishpat and the balance between them...
          1. Value number one is justice. The society is fair. Everyone gets a fair shake.
          2. There is a level playing field, and therefore, there is opportunity for all. Cheaters aren’t tolerated. Justice reigns supreme. That is ‘mishpat’, the Hebrew word for justice.
       2. But rules alone don’t make a good society. You have to have something else too.
          1. That brings you to value number two: the right thing to do, Tzedek. Someone is down on his luck and he’s homeless.
          2. It’s not the fairthing to do for me to reach out a hand to help him, but it is the right thing to do. To care for the less fortunate.
          3. To alleviate suffering when we can. To brighten the days of others. This is tzedek, the right thing to do – regardless of whether it happens to be fair.
       3. Every society must balance these prime values: Tzedek and Mishpat.
    2. Avoiding the Sin of Sedom in Our Own Lives
       1. Sedom did have justice. It created its own set of rules – but those rules didn’t express care and regard for the other. So the society

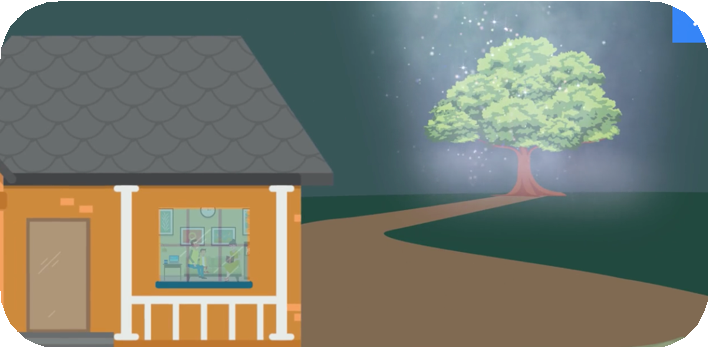
was devoid of tzedek. Hence its doom.

* + - 1. God tells Abraham that his nation, the one he’s going to create, in order to be successful, it is going to have to balance these two values.
         1. To attempt to create a society like this… is ultimately to walk on the

path of the Tree of Life. At some level, the Torah is God’s basic statement to man about these two values – Tzedek

and Mishpat.

* + - * 1. But the path to that tree, that seems to be our dynamic conversation with God about those values. Back in the garden, man resisted having a conversation with God; he was too busy hiding.
        2. But Abraham, he, at least, begins the conversation. And it is a conversation,

maybe, that is kept up through the ages. God gave us the Torah expressing Tzedek and Mishpat and we study that Torah, we wrestle with its meaning, we try to bring some sort of balance

between tzedek and mishpat into our personal and communal lives.

* + - * 1. So that we can do, and express in our lives, tzedek and mishpat.
        2. When we do that, we too, walk the path of the tree of life.



Hi everybody, this is Rabbi David Fohrman; welcome to Parshat Vayeira.

This week’s parsha contains a solution to a great mystery – a puzzle whose origins take us back to the Garden of Eden itself.

# Biblical

Connections to

# Sedom's

Sin... in Eden?

As Adam and Eve were being banished from Eden, the verse tells us that God ensconced special angels at the entrance of the Garden. They were there to stand guard. But the cherubs weren’t just there to guard the Garden in general; their interest was in a very particular part of the Garden:

ֽחַיִ ּֽים ה

ע ֥ץ

ד ֖ ֶרךְאֶת־

לִשְׁמֹ֕ר

to guard the path of the tree of life.

So, not only does the Garden of Eden contain a mysterious Tree of Life but, we learn in this verse, it also, apparently, contains a pathway – a pathway that leads right to that special tree. What is the meaning of this pathway? Was it a yellow brick road or something? A gravel path adorned with an attractive sign: 'This way to the Tree of Life?’

A path seems like a way of gaining access to the thing that lies at the end. So does the mystery of how to access the Tree of Life lie, somehow, in this path?

So I think our parsha, Parshat Vayeira, seems to illuminate the nature of this elusive pathway. To see how, I want to go back to Eden for a minute, back to that verse we just looked at – the passage that describes mankind’s banishment from the Garden – and play one of my favorite games: Where else do we hear these words?

And the ways it’s going to work is, we’re going to look at these ‘banishment from Eden’ verses, and I’m going to highlight eight peculiarities in that text. As I do, I want you to ask yourself: where else in the Bible do we meet a story that contains all eight of these elements?

Ready or not – here we go.

# Sending a Hand, Sending a Person

ח ֥י לְעֹל ֽם

ה ֽחַי ִּ֔ים וְאָכ ֖ל וָ

פֶן־ י ָדו וְלָקַח֙ ג ַּ֚ם מֵע ֣ץ

֣ח ׁל

ה ֽאדם֙ הָי ָה כְּאַח ֣ד מִמֶּ֔נ ּו ּלָד֖עַת ט֣וב וָ ָר ֑ע וְעַת ֣ה ׀ י ִ

֤ן ה

ויֹ֣ ּאמֶר ׀ י ְהוָ ֣ה אֱלֹהִ֗ים

And the LORD God said, “Now mankind has become like one of us, knowing good and bad; and now, perhaps he will stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!”

Ok, so right there is the first element I want you to pay attention to: the word shalach paired with the

word yad; the stretching out of a person’s hand, in order to grab something. Let’s find the next element. Back in our verses we’ve got next:

שׁ ֽם׃

ה ֣אדמָ֔האֶת־ אֲשׁ ֥ר לֻקּ ֖ח מִ

ֽעֲבֹד ל

ע ֑ ֶדןמִג ַּן־

ה ֖ים

ּח ֛הו ּי ְהוָ ֥ה אֱלֹ

וַ ֽי ְשַׁ

So the LORD God sent him from the garden of Eden, to work the land from which he was taken. Someone being sent out of the place they are living. That’s element number two.

# The Garden

The next element adds more specificity to the place which the person is being sent from. In our original

story that place was ַּן־ מִג,ֶדן ֑ עfrom the Garden of Eden. And, in the other story I’m thinking about – the

place from which someone is sent – it just happens to be a garden, too. That’s element number 3. A garden.

Next in the Eden narrative we arrive at the verse we talked about just a minute ago:

וַי ְגָ ֖ ֶרשׁ ה ֽאד ֑םאֶת־ וַי ַ ּשְׁכֵּן֩ מִקּדם עֵ֜דןלְג ַן־ הַכּרבִ֗יםאֶת־

He drove the man out, and stationed, east of the garden of Eden, these angels called cherubs… Well, in the other story I’m thinking about, guess what? We also meet angels.

Angels: Element number 4.

So, back in Eden, just where were those angels? The verse says they were stationed ַן־ לְג.עֵ֜דן מִקּדםWell, wouldn’t you know it? In that other story I’m thinking about, we also have that very same direction pointer: The word ‘mikedem,’ from the east.

That’s element number 5.

And, picking up again in our Eden story, those angels in the east, it turns out they were holding something: A flaming sword. Special, divine fire. Well, the story I’m thinking about also has special, divine fire in it, too.

Divine Flames: Element number 6.

Back to Eden, that flaming sword the angels were holding, the Torah tells us something unusual about it. The sword was .מִּתְהַפ֔כֶתThat word literally means ‘turned over’ or ‘reversed.’ The sword seems to have been turning around, somehow. And it just so happens that this word, mit’hapechet – that shows up in the other story I’m thinking about, too: That story, too, is about something that gets turned around, or

turned over.

That’s element number 7: Mit’hapechet.

So folks, I’m going to hold back for a minute on the promised eighth element, for a minute, but we’ve got enough to go on here for the meantime.

Let’s get to the $64,000 question: What other story has all these elements? Shalach yad – sending out your hand to grab something – followed by just ‘shalach’ – sending someone out of their home. The word Mikedem. A garden. Angels. Fire. Mithapechet. What other story has got, not just some of these elements, but all of them?

# Parallels to

Sodom

and

# Gomorrah

in the Bible

Well… Welcome to this week’s parsha. The other story is the destruction of Sedom. And yeah, all eight elements.

Sending out a hand to grab something? Check. That’s the angels, they are in Sedom with Lot, and the mob approaches them, the mob is seeking to molest the guests Lot has brought in his house. At that

life. his save they Lot, grab and hand’ their out ‘send angels theוַי ִ ּשְׁלְח֤ו ּ ֽהָאֲנ ָשִׁים֙ י ָ ָד֔ם,אֶת־ moment,

Right after that, Lot gets ‘sent’ from the city: הַהֲפֵכָ֔ה מִתּ֣וךְ לוט֙אֶת־ ֤ח ׁלּ God remembers Abraham and sends Lot from the destruction.

ה ֑םאֶת־ וַי ְ

ה ֖ים אַבְר

–וַי ִ ּז ְכּ֥ר אֱלֹ

What about a garden? Well, back when Lot first settled in Sedom, the Torah just happens to mention that Sedom was kegan hashem, like the Garden of Eden itself, it was a very lush and fertile area with a river running through it.

Mikedem? Yup, got that too. When Lot chooses to settle in Sedom in the first place, we hear “vayisa Lot mikedem” – Lot travels from the East…

Next element: Angels? Well, we’ve got that: Of course, the angels come to destroy Sedom.

And special, divine fire? Oh yeah, Sedom has plenty of that. It is destroyed through divine fire, raining down from heaven.

What verb does the Torah use to describe that destruction? You might have guessed it: The same verb as

that rotating sword back in Eden, mit’hapechet: .הַהֲפֵכָ֔ה

ׁלּ ֤ח לוט֙אֶת־ מִתּ֣ו

ְ וַיAnd Lot was sent out

from the destruction. But the word for destruction is haphechah, literally: “turned-over-ness.”

# Clues to

Unravel the Meaning of

# Sedom's

Sin

So… we’ve seen seven parallel elements thus far. We will get to the eighth in a moment, but I just want

to stop here for a minute and ask you what you think the meaning is of that which we have seen thus far?

It certainly seems like the story of Adam’s banishment from Eden is getting paralleled in an eerie kind of way by this week’s story of the destruction of Sedom. But I want to ask why the Torah would do that? What are we meant to learn from it? That is a very good question. I want to hazard a guess.

Broadly speaking, how would you say we might summarize the similarity between these stories? Well, in both stories, we are looking at the loss of a garden. The first is a Divine Garden, God’s special place on earth. The second is a more mundane place – the fertile plain of the Jordan valley, the place where Sedom was situated – a paradisaical, lush setting, perfect for growing wonderful crops. In each story, the inhabitants commit some sort of sin, and lose access to the garden.

Okay so that’s the basic similarities between the stories. But beyond that there are some important contrasts between these two stories. In the first story, in Eden, Adam and Eve, they lose access to the garden – but neither they nor the garden is destroyed. In the Sedom story, though, God goes further. Both the inhabitants and the garden perish.

It seems that we are looking at a kind of progression here. The eating of the forbidden fruit, that was a first step along a dark and dangerous path – a path whose possible end state is Sedom.

In other words: If people don’t disabuse themselves of the evil values they expressed by reaching for that fruit, they risk the possibility that some time in the future, these evil values will give rise to an entire society that institutionalizes these values. If that would ever happen, the society itself would need to be destroyed.

# What Was the Real Sin of

Sodom

and

# Gomorrah?

The people of Sedom, they weren’t just bad; they institutionalized evil, they built it into their system of law. The mob that converged on Lot’s door that sought to molest his guests, the text describes them as ‘young and old, from one part of society to the other.’ A strange demographic, wouldn’t you say?

It doesn’t seem like the mob was motivated by lust, they were motivated by civic duty. This was a mass, civic, protest on Lot’s lawn, because… Lot broke the rules.

Sedom, it was the original gated community – and, as the Ramban writes, the rules were: We keep guests out of our little, paradisiacal, place, by raping and robbing them. The Sedomites, they institutionalized evil.

Ultimately, there is no place in the world for a society like that. Both the garden and the inhabitants have got to go.

# The Eighth Parallel Between

Sedom

# and Eden

But if the parallels we have seen suggest the existence of a dark path, perhaps they also suggest the existence of another kind of path. A wonderful path. And this brings us straight to the eighth parallel between these stories.

You can see the eighth parallel if you keep just keep reading the Eden story – after we read of the angels, with their fire, and the sword that is mit’hapechet… after that, we hear one last thing. We hear about the purpose of the angels.

ֽחַיִ ּֽים׃ ה

ע ֥ץ

ד ֖ ֶרךְאֶת־

לִשְׁמֹ֕ר

and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the path of the tree of life.

That same language, ‘lishmor derech’, appears in the Sedom story. Guess where?

# The Path to

Justice... and the True Sin of

# Sodom

and

# Gomorrah

That expression appears right before God decides to destroy Sedom. At that particular moment in time, God chooses to consult Abraham about the Lord’s plans. And then, in a narrative aside, God tells us why He’s even bothering to consult Abraham about His plans.

God says to Himself:

ֽהַמְכַס ֤ה אֲנ ִי מֵֽאַבְרהָ֔ם אֲשׁ ֖ר אֲנִ ֥י עֹשֽׂה׃

“Shall I really hide from Abraham what I am about to do...

פ ֑ט

ק ֖ה ו ּמשׁ

ד ֣ ֶרךְ י ְהוָ֔ה לַעֲשׂות צְד

שׁ ֽמְרו֙ ּ

כִּ֣י י ְ ַדעְתִּ֗יו לְמַעַן֩ אֲשֶׁ֨ר י ְצַוֶּ֜ה בָּנָ ֤יואֶת־ בֵּיתו֙וְאֶת־ אַחֲר֔יו וְ

...for I have connected with [Abraham], so that he may instruct his children and his progeny after him, to keep the path of God – to do what is just and ..what is right.”

There it is: lishmor derech in the Sedom story. Keeping or guarding the path back to the Tree of Life somehow gets mirrored in Sedom by Abraham’s keeping the path of God … to do tzedek and mishpat: What is right and what is just.

Fascinating! Earlier, back in Parshat Bereishit, I talked to you about how cherubs, they appear twice in the Five Books of Moses, once, where they guard the original tree of life, and once more, when they guard the Ten Commandments – the Torah – which, interestingly enough, is described in Proverbs as a Tree of Life.

So, add it all up: these cherubs, they always end up guarding some sort of Tree of Life.

But if the Torah is a tree of life, we now see that this tree so to speak, comes with a path – a path you can walk on. What is that path? L’asot Tzedaka U’mishpat. It is the path of tzedek and mishpat. The right thing to do and the just thing to do.

The just thing to do and the right thing to do. How fascinating. We often think these two are synonyms. They kind of mean the same thing. But I want to suggest that they are actually not the same thing at all. They are actually in tension with each other.

There are two values here. They are the two building blocks of any virtuous society. Both values are crucial – Tzedek and Mishpat – and the tension between them defines exactly what kind of a society you’re really going to have.

Stand back and imagine the perfect society, and then ask yourself: Why is it good to live there? invariably, you will find yourself giving an answer, that will take you back to tzedek and mishpat and the balance between them...

Value number one is justice. The society is fair. Everyone gets a fair shake. There is a level playing field, and therefore, there is opportunity for all. Cheaters aren’t tolerated. Justice reigns supreme. That is ‘mishpat’, the Hebrew word for justice.

But rules alone don’t make a good society. You have to have something else too.

That brings you to value number two: the right thing to do, Tzedek. Someone is down on his luck and he’s homeless. It’s not the fair thing to do for me to reach out a hand to help him, but it is the right thing to do. To care for the less fortunate. To alleviate suffering when we can. To brighten the days of others. This is tzedek, the right thing to do – regardless of whether it happens to be fair.

Every society must balance these prime values: Tzedek and Mishpat.

# The Biblical

Lesson

# Behind the Sins

of Sodom

and

# Gomorrah

Sedom did have justice. It created its own set of rules – but those rules didn’t express care and regard for the other. So the society was devoid of tzedek. Hence its doom.

God tells Abraham that his nation, the one he’s going to create, in order to be successful, it is going to have to balance these two values. To attempt to create a society like this… is ultimately to walk on the path of the Tree of Life.

At some level, the Torah is God’s basic statement to man about these two values – Tzedek and Mishpat. But the path to that tree, that seems to be our dynamic conversation with God about those values.

Back in the garden, man resisted having a conversation with God; he was too busy hiding. But Abraham, he, at least, begins the conversation. And it is a conversation, maybe, that is kept up through the ages.

God gave us the Torah expressing Tzedek and Mishpat and we [study that Torah](https://www.alephbeta.org/), we wrestle with its meaning, we try to bring some sort of balance between tzedek and mishpat into our personal and communal lives. So that we can do, and express in our lives, tzedek and mishpat. When we do that, we too, walk the path of the tree of life.

David: Welcome to Parshat Vayeira! Last week, we talked about Abraham as the father of a model nation, living what it means to be in a relationship with God.

Immanuel: Do those themes carry over into this week's parsha? We think they do, in some pretty astounding ways.

David: To see what we're talking about, let's take a closer look at a really strange conversation between God and Abraham before the city of Sodom is destroyed.

# Abraham Pleads to

God to

Not

# Destroy

Sodom

and

# Gomorrah

Immanuel: Here's what happens. For some reason, God decides to tells Abraham about the plan to destroy Sodom. Abraham steps in and says, "But God, let's say there are 50 righteous people in the city... would you really destroy the whole city then?" And God says "No, I won't destroy it if there are 50."

David: And then it just becomes a bargaining session. Abraham says, "What if there are 45 tzadikim?" "Okay, I won't destroy it for 45." "What about 40?" And that goes on until Abraham reaches 10. And that's basically the conversation.

Immanuel: So here are two really big questions we have on this story. Number one, why in the world was God consulting Abraham about this? Couldn't God have made this decision on His own? And it seems like God doesn't even listen to Abraham in the end, God just destroys the city anyway.

David: Number two, what was Abraham even arguing for? It seems like there are two possibilities. Either Abraham was asking if the righteous people would be saved, while the wicked were killed, or he was asking if everyone could be saved, on account of those righteous people.

# Why Did

God

# Destroy

Really

# Sodom

and

# Gomorrah?

Immanuel: But neither of these possibilities makes much sense to begin with. If God is saying He is destroying the city, wouldn't He have taken the righteous people into account from the get-go?

Abraham can't be teaching God the rules of the Geneva convention. And even if he was, the bargaining wouldn't make much sense. Fifty people as collateral damage is bad, but nine is okay?

David: And if Abraham was asking for the wicked to be saved on account of the righteous, where's the justice in that? Do righteous people have special powers, where they meditate and extend their prophetic auras to shelter evil people? Why is that something Abraham's interested in?

Immanuel: Question number three, the conversation between God and Abraham ends super abruptly. Abraham had just asked God if 10 people were enough to spare the city, God says yes, and then God just leaves. אַבְרהָםו אֶל לְדבֵּר ,כִּלָּה כַּאֲשֶׁר ְהוָה י ּלֶך ֵ וַי– God left as soon as he finished talking to Abraham. He never says: "Ten is fine, but there aren't even 10...so I guess I have to destroy the city." He just leaves. What's going on here?

David: Maybe their conversation wasn't really over... Immanuel: Hi everyone. I'm Imu Shalev.

David: And I'm David Block.

Immanuel: Welcome to the Parshat Experiment.

# The

Story

# Surrounding

Sodom

and

# Gomorrah

Immanuel: This week's parsha is full of some of our favorite Abraham stories. Even though we picked some pretty interesting questions to address this week, we unfortunately can't get to every exciting story. Just to frame our questions, here's a 20-second parsha recap:

Three men visit Abraham and they share that news that Sarah will have a child.

Then God tells Abraham about his plans to destroy Sodom, and it seems that Abraham tries to convince God not to...

Then angels go to Sodom to save Lot.

Sodom is destroyed, and something weird happens with Lot and his daughters.

There's a famine, and Abraham goes down to Gerar to get food… and he says – again – that Sarah is his sister.

Isaac's born.

Hagar and Ishmael are sent away.

Abraham makes a covenant with Abimelech. And then we have the Binding of Isaac.

Immanuel: Okay, back to Sodom and God and Abraham's strange conversation. We know that it seems to end abruptly, but what if the conversation wasn't really over? What if God sort of kept it going in some way?

David: What do you mean by that?

Immanuel: Take a look at what happens next in the story. The Torah cuts to Sodom for its impending destruction, but that's not what the text focuses on. Instead, we read about the angels who are here to save someone... presumably, a righteous person, Lot, from the impending destruction.

David: Right, it sorta looks like Abraham failed to convince God, there weren't 10 righteous people, and now God is going to airlift Lot out of the city.

Immanuel: But not just yet.

# Ten Righteous People to Destruction

Stop

# Sodom

and

# Gomorrah's

Immanuel: The angels arrive in the city, and Lot takes them in as guests. And it seems like the text is drawing a parallel – just as Abraham does chesed, kindness, with these men, Lot does kindness with them as well. Lot is continuing the legacy of Abraham, doing good in a city of evil.

David: But he's not exactly like Abraham. After Lot takes the men into his home, things go south, very quickly. The people of Sodom are really angry – they seem to hate the kindness to strangers – and they demand that Lot turn the people over to them. Lot tries to convince the mob not to harm the guests.

And look at how the people react:

Immanuel: " "ּר לָגו בָּא ּהָאֶחָד ּאמְרו וַיֹ– and they said, "this guy – Lot – came to live here – שָׁפוט פט עַתָּה– and now's he's going to be a judge over us??" Lot stands up for justice and kindness... but

–וַי ִ ּשׁ

unfortunately, he fails to influence the people of Sodom. The mob starts to press in on the house and the situation becomes dire.

David: The angels reveal to Lot that the city is about to be destroyed, and that they are here to save him. But the angels aren't just here to save Lot, they're here to save some other people too. They ask him:

son- Your here? is else Whoהוצֵא, מִן הַמָּקום". " :חָתָן ו ּבָנ ֶיךָ ו ּבְנֹתֶיךָ, וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ בָּעִיר–עֹד מִי לְךָ פֹה place." this of out them take city, the in have you else whatever and daughters, your sons, your in-law,

So let's count:

Lot's sons-in-law – we see later that there are two.

His sons – and the plural language of " "בניךindicates that there were at least two. And then בנותיךwhich is also plural – at least two daughters. That's six.

Immanuel: Now, you'd assume that those two daughters were the wives of his two sons-in-law. But earlier in one of the most horrible parts of the story, to appease the mob that was trying to get at Lot's guests, Lot tried to send out his two unmarried daughters. The verse says: "

"ּאִישׁ ְדעו ָ י לֹא אֲשֶׁר ,בָנות שְׁתֵּי לִי ָא נ ֵּה הִנ– here are my two daughters who have not been with a man. So he actually has four daughters – two married, two unmarried. That's a total of eight people. Add Lot and his wife? And we're at 10 people…

David: So you're saying…

Immanuel: Yup. If there were going to be 10 righteous people in the city of Sodom, could it be that Abraham was talking about Lot's family? Abraham was pleading with God to spare the city, on account of Lot!

Here's what we think happened: when God and Abraham were haggling on the number of righteous people and they stopped at 10, God isn't abruptly ending the conversation. He doesn't say, "Sorry, Abraham, there aren't 10" – He gives Lot and his family a chance.

# Could

Abraham and

Lot

# Have Saved

Sodom

# From

Destruction?

tried… Lot that seems it And family. his gather to him tell angels the happens: what here's And David: law in sons his to speak to went Lotוַי ֵ ּצֵא לוט וַי ְ ַדבֵּר אֶל חֲתָנ ָיו לֹקְחֵי בְנֹתָיו", " unsuccessful. was but place, this leave and up "get said, he and –וַיֹ ּאמֶר קו ּמו ּצְ ּאו ּמִן הַמָּקום הַז ֶ ּה, כִּי מַשְׁחִית י ְהוָה, אֶת הָעִיר

because God is going to destroy this city!" But they don't heed his warning. " "ָיו חֲתָנ ֵי בְּעֵינ ,כִמְצַחֵק ְהִי וַי– but Lot was as a joker in their eyes. They didn't take him seriously.

Immanuel: The story of Lot in Sodom seems to emphasize two things:

1. Lot is sort of a righteous person. He is kind to strangers just like Abraham is kind to strangers, and he doesn't deserve to be destroyed along with the wicked.
2. Lot may be a good person, but he never seems to convince anyone else to become a good person either. He stands up against the mob, but fails miserably.

David: He isn't even able to influence his sons-in-law, his daughters, and his own sons, Lot can't convince anyone to come with him other than the people directly dependent on him: his wife and two daughters. In short, Lot's influence doesn't even extend over his family...10 people.

Immanuel: God told Abraham that if there were 10 righteous people, Sodom wouldn't be destroyed. It seems that if Lot would have been able to get his family together, that would've been the 10 righteous people, and that would've been the conclusion to the conversation between God and Abraham: Yes – there are 10 good people! Sodom will be saved…. But Lot failed.

David: Right – Ironically, if he was able to get his own family together to leave, maybe they wouldn't have had to leave.

Immanuel: If Lot's challenge as a righteous person was to influence and convince others, would that help us to understand a little bit more about God and Abraham's bargaining session?

# Abraham and Gomorrah

Lot's

# Mission in the

Story of

# Sodom

and

David: Maybe Abraham was asking God: "What if there are 50 tzadikim – 50 good people (or 45, or 40, or 30) he wasn't just asking about righteous people in the city, meditating and creating a spiritual force field to spare the evil people. Abraham was talking about righteous people who had the potential to positively influence others.

Immanuel: If, in the city of Sodom there's real potential to impact, to change, to improve; if there are people there who can positively influence Sodom to embrace righteousness, then it's not really an evil city. It's a righteous city in progress. Because that seems to be the role of a righteous person – they don't

just sit alone and do good all by themselves. They're supposed to influence others. And if there's one righteous person, there should be 10.

David: So why is God involving Abraham in all of this? Why is it any of his business? Well...where else have we seen the idea of people whose job it is to impact with good?

Immanuel: Ummm, that's exactly what we said Abraham's mission was last week. In their first-ever

the of people the all you, through –וְנ ִברכו ּבְךָ, כֹּל מִשְׁפחֹת הָאֲדמָה" " Abraham to said God encounter,

world will be blessed. Abraham was familiar with the concept of positively impacting a community because he was supposed to be a model of good values.

David: And take a look at the verses right before the conversation, when God decides to tell Abraham about the plan to destroy Sodom. We get a very rare glimpse into God's own mindset: " אָמָר ,וַיהוָה:" – and God said, to Himself, it seems… " "עֹשֶׂה ִי אֲנ אֲשֶׁר ,מֵאַבְרהָם ִי אֲנ הַמְכַסֶּה– can I hide what I'm doing from Abraham? וְאַבְרהָם–ּם וְעָצו ,ָּדול ג לְגוי ֶה ִהְי י הָיו; – Abraham is going to be a big, strong nation… הָאָרץ ֵי ֹוי ּ ג ,כֹּל ּבו ִברכו וְנ– and through him, all the nations of world will be blessed.

Immauel: Look at that, there's that phrase again – ּבו ִברכו וְנ–הָאָרץ ֵי ֹוי ּ ג ,כֹּל… the words that encapsulate Abraham's entire mission – to bring blessing to the world, to be a model nation. And the pasuk teaches us that it's because of that mission that God chooses to tell Abraham about Sodom.

David: But God continues, ַדעְתִּיו ְ י כִּי– for I know Abraham –

his command he'll that extent the to –לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר י ְצַוֶ ּה אֶת בָּנ ָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתו אַחֲריו, וְשָׁמְרו ּדּרךְ י ְהוָה

children and his household afterward to keep the path of God. And what's that path?

justice. and righteousness do to –לַעֲשׂ ֹות צְדקָה ו ּמִשׁפט

Immanuel: Look at what's going on here. For the first time, we actually get sense of what Abraham's

mission is. Yeah, he's supposed to be a model of goodness… but in what way? פט teaching righteousness and justice.

in –לַעֲשׂ ֹות צְדקָה ו ּמִשׁ

# The Real

Reason

God

# Destroyed

Sodom

and

# Gomorrah

David: Last week, we learned about Abraham selflessly focusing on God's legacy instead of his own, but this adds a layer of depth to Abraham's mission though – selflessness isn't just about focusing on God… it's about focusing on other people too. It's about doing and teaching righteousness and justice in human relationships as well!

Immanuel: And because of that mission, God chooses to engage Abraham in the conversation. It seems that God wants to teach Abraham something about his mission – about the power of influence…

David: Abraham is confronted with the possible destruction of Sodom and is forced to consider what might save them. And he quickly realizes that the fate of the people in the city rests on the shoulders of the righteous whose job it is to teach the qualities of justice and kindness. So Abraham dares to ask: "God,

what if there are 50 righteous people in the city – doesn't that show that there's potential for larger change?"

Immanuel: And God says, yes! Exactly! This story shows us a beautiful teachable moment: God's willingness to save a whole city because of the potential of influencers shows Abraham the power of his own potential to be a positive force of goodness to those around him.

David: And the Lot story is there to show us – the reader – the stark contrast between Lot and Abraham

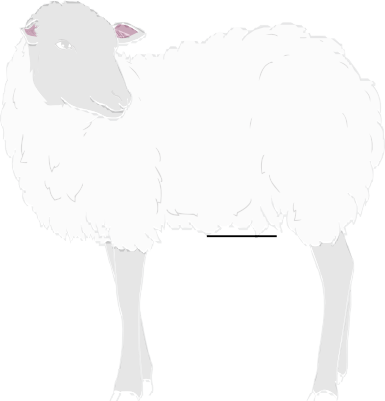
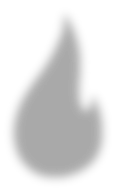
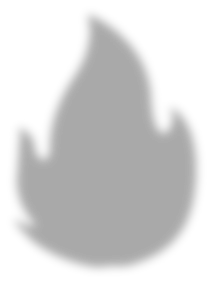
– someone who tries and fails at influencing and someone who tries and succeeds.

Immanuel: We saw last week that after a bunch of failures of mankind, God created a Plan C – God chose someone, Abraham, to bring blessing to the rest of the world. This week's parsha gives us even deeper insight into that mission. God teaches Abraham to become a role model of how to treat other people – with tzedek u'mishpat, and his responsibility to teach others to be kind and just too.

David: Justice, kindness towards others, the focus on the relationship with God – these are the central values that will appear as we continue to read through the Torah. Abraham, and the great nation that God will establish through him, will be the ambassadors of these values.

Immanuel: But we're a long way away from that great nation and its birth in the [Book of Exodus](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/exodus). How will Abraham succeed at teaching his values to the next generation and ensuring that his legacy – God's legacy – endures?

David: Join us next time on the Parsha Experiment.



**VAYEIRA: ABRAHAM’S STRUGGLE WITH LOYALTY**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Vayeira!

**Understanding the Akeida**

This week’s parsha contains one of the most difficult stories in the entire Torah: the *akeida*, the binding of Isaac. It’s a father’s worst nightmare: God comes to Abraham and commands him to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. It’s

troubling, even twisted, and certainly difficult to read… and yet there it is in the Torah, in the pages of God’s book. How do we make any sense of it?

### PONDER THIS



What do you think we’re supposed to learn from the *akeida*? What do you find troubling about it? What are some of the explanations that you’ve heard of this story? Do they resonate with you? Why or why not?

One possible lesson is: we should surrender completely to God’s will, no matter the command, no matter the cost. In a toss up between a divine command and our intuitive notions of morality, there’s no contest: God’s authority trumps all else.

So imagine that God commands you to do something, say, to harm one of your loved ones… and your gut, your conscience, tells you that it’s wrong. Your job is to suppress that gut instinct, right? That’s what Abraham’s example is coming to teach us… right? After all, you’re not the judge of right and wrong - God is. God wills it, so, end of story… right?

Viewed in this light, the *akeida* is a pure test of faith, intended to see whether Avraham will be steadfast in his devotion to God – or whether he will flounder and give in to his love for his son.

That’s one way to read it. But we think that narrative misses a big part of the story. We want to argue that the *akeida* is more than a test of faith; it’s about more than Abraham’s loyalty to God.

So what is the *akeida* about? Let’s dive into the text and see.

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Vayeira: Abraham’s Struggle With Loyalty” (available for

viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

## The Search Begins

**LOOK INSIDE: The *akeida***



We want to draw your attention to a fascinating pattern in the text of the *akeida* which we reveals what it’s really “about.” To see it, we’re going to jump right into the middle of the account. (If you want to read

through the whole story of the *akeida*, you can find it on your Source Sheet). Read the verses below. Do you notice any patterns? Are there any words or phrases which repeat?

**Genesis 22:6–10**

**6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and

העֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם ַעל- ִי ְצ ָחק

##### בראשית כב:ו–י

**ו** ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ע ֵצי

laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire

ּב ָיד ֹו, ֶאת-ה ֵא ׁש ְו ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת; ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו

ּבנ ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח

and the knife; and they went, both of them, together. **7** And

ְש ֵני ֶהם, ַיחְ ָ ּדו. **ז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק ֶאל-א ְב ָר ָהם ָא ִביו,

Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: ‘My father.’

ה ֵא ׁש

ה ֵּנה

ִני; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ב

ֶּנ ִּני ה

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ָא ִבי, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר,

And he said: ‘Here am I, my son.’ And he said: ‘Behold the fire

**ח** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ַא ְב ָר ָהם,לעֹ ָלה.

הֶּ ׂשה,

ו ָה ֵע ִצים, ְו ַא ֵ ּיה

and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’

ּב ִני; ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵני ֶהם,

ָלה, לעֹ

הֶּ ׂשה

אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו

**8** And Abraham said: ‘God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’ And they went, both of them,

יחְ ָ ּדו. **ט** ַו ָ ּיבאו, ֶאל-ה ָּמקום ֲא ׁ ֶשר ָא ַמר-ל ֹו

האֱ לֹקים, ַו ִ ּי ֶבן ׁ ָשם ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ַו ַ ּי ֲערֹ ְך

together. **9** And they came to the place which God had told

ּבנ ֹו, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם אֹת ֹו

את-ה ֵע ִצים; ַו ַ ּי ֲעקֹד, ֶאת- ִי ְצ ָחק

him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood

על-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ִמ ַּמ ַעל ָל ֵע ִצים. **י** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַא ְב ָר ָהם

in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. **10** And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

ל ׁ ְשחֹט, ֶאת- ְבנ ֹו.

את- ָיד ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת,

If you look at verses 6 and 8, you’ll see that they end with the exact same phrase:

**Genesis 22:6**

ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵני ֶהם ַי ְח ָ ּדו

and they went, both of them, together

Now, it’s not unusual for the Bible to repeat a phrase if it’s an important part of the story line. But here, it doesn’t seem to add much. Think about it this way: if you didn’t have the second “and they went, both of them, together,” would you

really wonder, “Wait, are they still together?”? I mean, there’s only one verse in between. So let’s put a flag in the text right there; this may be our first clue.

**ELEMENT A**

**ELEMENT B ELEMENT C**

**CENTER ELEMENT C**

**ELEMENT B**

**ELEMENT A**

If you read last week’s guide to Parshat Lech Lecha, the wheels in your head may already be starting to turn. Because whenever you find a strange repetition in the biblical text, it’s always a good idea to consider the possibility that it’s a *chiasm*. As we explained in the last guide, a chiasm is an A-B-A pattern, a pattern in which the first element mirrors the last element, the second element mirrors the second-to-last element, and so on. The pattern continues, building until its climax in the center. If you can identify and understand the center of a chiasm, then you’ll have the key to unlocking the meaning of the entire story.

Is that what’s happening here? Let’s keep exploring the text to see.

## More Clues?

So we found one repeating phrase – noteworthy, but that’s hardly a pattern. But if our theory is right, and this passage really is arrayed as a chiasm, then we should be able to find more clues. Remember that a chiasm builds outward from the center. So we should be able to look right *before* the first “and they went, both of them, together” and find a parallel right *after* the second “and they went, both of them, together.”

### LOOK INSIDE: Looking Before and After



In a chiasm, the corresponding elements aren’t always exactly the same, like they were with “and they went, both of them, together.” Sometimes you’ll find verses which describe a *similar concept* but with *different words*. Other times, you’ll find *mirror images,* two descriptions that seem like inverse echoes of one another. What’s key is that the two elements of the pair seem to be, somehow, in conversation with one another.

Take a look at the verses below. Do you see anything that looks like a parallel pair?

## *Before* the first “and they went…” *After* the second “and they went…”

**Genesis 22:6**

##### בראשית כב:ו

**Genesis 22:9**

##### בראשית כב:ט

**ו** ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ע ֵצי העֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם ַעל- ִי ְצ ָחק

**ט** ַו ָ ּיבאו, ֶאל-ה ָּמקום ֲא ׁ ֶשר ָא ַמר- ָלהֹואֱ לֹקים, ַו ִ ּי ֶבן ׁ ָשם

ֶאת-ה ֵא ׁש ְו ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת... ּב ָיד ֹו,

ּבנ ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח

א ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ַו ַ ּי ֲערֹ ְך ֶאת-ה ֵע ִצים; ַו ַ ּי ֲעקֹד, ֶאת- ִי ְצ ָחק

ְּבנ ֹו, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם אֹת ֹו ַעל-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ִמ ַּמ ַעל ָל ֵע ִצים.

**6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife...

**9** And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

At the end of verse 6, we’re told that Abraham takes wood and lays it on top of Isaac. Let’s think about this image. If you wanted to carry branches of wood on your back, what would you have to do to them? You’d have to tie them together into a bundle. That means that in verse 6, we have **tied-up wood on top of Isaac.**

Now take a look at verse 9: Abraham ties up Isaac and lays him on top of the wood that is on the altar. In other words, it’s **tied-up Isaac on top of wood.** Sounds like a mirror image to us!

## What’s In The Middle?

We’re starting to see the chiasm unfold before us, a once-invisible structure coming into focus:

**Genesis 22:6–9**

1. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering,

העֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם ַעל- ִי ְצ ָחק

##### בראשית כב:ו–ט

**ו** ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ע ֵצי

and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand

ּב ָיד ֹו, ֶאת-ה ֵא ׁש ְו ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת; וַ ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו

ְבּנ ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח

the fire and the knife; and they went, both of them,

ְש ֵני ֶהם, ַיחְ ָ ּדו. **ז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק ֶאל-א ְב ָר ָהם ָא ִביו,

together. **7** And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father,

ה ֵא ׁש

ה ֵּנה

ִני; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ב

ֶּנ ִּני ה

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ָא ִבי, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר,

and said: ‘My father.’ And he said: ‘Here am I, my son.’

**ח** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ַא ְב ָר ָהם,לעֹ ָלה.

הֶּ ׂשה,

ו ָה ֵע ִצים, ְו ַא ֵ ּיה

And he said: ‘Behold the fire and the wood; but where

ּב ִני; ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵניהֶם,

ָלה, לעֹ

הֶּ ׂשה

אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו

is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’ **8** And Abraham said: ‘God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering,

יחְ ָ ּדו. **ט** ַו ָ ּיבאו, ֶאל-ה ָּמקום ֲא ׁ ֶשר ָא ַמר- ָלהֹואֱ לֹקים,

ו ִ ּי ֶבן ׁ ָשם ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ַו ַ ּי ֲערֹ ְך ֶאת-ה ֵע ִצים;

my son.’ And they went, both of them, together. **9** And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

ּבנ ֹו, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם אֹת ֹו ַעל-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח,

ו ַ ּי ֲעקֹד, ֶאת- ִי ְצ ָחק

מִ ַמּ ַעל ָל ֵע ִצים.

This isn’t just a coincidence. Indeed, the pattern continues building outward; we encourage you to continue to trace it, or you can take our word for it. But we’re now in a position to ask the big question: What’s in the middle of this chiasm? After all, that’s the bullseye, the center of gravity around which the story revolves. Once we’ve identified the center, we’ll be able to take a step back and read the whole story in a new light.

It seems that the center is to be found in verses 7-8, in a conversation between Abraham and Isaac. Let’s take a closer look.

## The Conversation at the Center

### LOOK INSIDE: Closing in on the Center



Take a look at the verses below. Why do you think this conversation is at the center of our chiasm? What would you say is the *climax* of this conversation?

**Genesis 22:7–8**

1. And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said:

##### בראשית כב:ז–ח

**ז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק ֶאל-א ְב ָר ָהם ָא ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָא ִבי,

‘My father.’ And he said: ‘Here am I, my son.’ And he

ה ֵא ׁש ְו ָה ֵע ִצים, ְו ַא ֵ ּיה

ה ֵּנה

ִני; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ב

ֶּנ ִּני ה

ו ּיֹא ֶמר,

said: ‘Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’ **8** And Abraham said: ‘God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’...

ֹ**ח** ַאו ֶּימר, ַא ְב ָר ָהם, אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו

ִני... ּב

ְלעֹ ָלה.

ָלה, לעֹ

הֶּ ׂשה, הֶּ ׂשה

It turns out that this is the only conversation between Abraham and Isaac that is recorded in the entire Bible. What did they say to one another? Let’s first try to understand their dialogue, and then we can figure out why there’s a whole chiasm built around it.

Isaac asks his father:

**Genesis 22:7**

לעֹ ָלה

הֶּ ׂשה

ו ַא ֵ ּיה

Where is the lamb for the offering?

We want to point out that the language here is a little bit unusual. There are two words in Hebrew for “where,” and this

verse features ּיה ֵ אַ (“*ayeh*”), which is the less common of the two. The other word in Hebrew for “where” is אֵיפה (“*eifo*”).

Now, you might be asking: why do we need two words that mean the same thing? The answer is: We don’t. They have

*slightly* different meanings.

If you do an experiment and look for all of the instances of the word *eifo* in the Bible and compare it to the instances of *ayeh*, you’ll start to see a pattern, to detect some of the nuances between them. For starters, you’ll find that *eifo* is almost always a general request for location.

### PONDER THIS



So then what is ayeh? What else could “Where?” possibly mean?1

1 If you want to get even more of a feel for this, we invite you to take a look at some other instances of “*ayeh*” in the Bible. Start with Bereishit 3:9 and 4:9. (You’ll find the word word ּיה ֵ אַ with suffixes, so it

appears in a slightly different form each time, but the root is the same.)

Ayeh is not a logistical question. Isaac isn’t asking: “Hey Dad, where’s the lamb? Did we leave it by the woodshed, or is it at the house?” That’s an eifo question. Ayeh is an emotional question. It’s asking “Where?” about something that is missing, something whose absence is a cause for concern, for anguish even.



**PONDER THIS**

In light of that, look again at Isaac’s question:

**Genesis 22:7**

לעֹ ָלה

הֶּ ׂשה

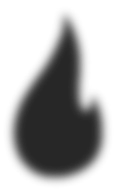
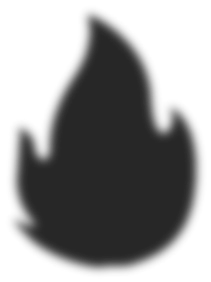
ו ַא ֵ ּיה

Where is the lamb for the offering?

What is Isaac really asking?

Isaac is asking: “Where did the lamb go? It was supposed to be here.” In other words, he’s asking: “Am I the lamb?” That’s a stark, painful question.

## Tricky Translation



And how does Abraham answer his son? Let’s look carefully at what happens next in this conversation.

### LOOK INSIDE



How do you understand Abraham’s reply?

**Genesis 22:8**

ּב ִני

ָלה לעֹ

הֶּ ׂשה

אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו

God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.

Now, can you think of a second way to translate it?

This sentence can be understood in one of two ways2, and it really hinges on how you translate “my son.” Here’s the most straightforward reading: Abraham is giving Isaac a piece of information (“God will provide Himself the lamb for the offering”) and then closes out the sentence by addressing him: “my son.” But with only a little bit of poetic license, you can read the sentence another way. What if “my son” is a part of the information? It suggests that “my son” *is* the offering.

2 Rashi points this out in his comment on the verse.

The meaning of verse 8 is unclear. Why is Abraham being so ambiguous?

**Here’s our take:** Maybe Abraham *doesn’t exactly know* what will happen at the top of the mountain. God had promised him that He would make him into a great nation – and now God is asking him to sacrifice his son, the very son who is to fulfill God’s promise. How can Abraham make sense of this? It’s a contradiction, a paradox. Abraham *can’t* make sense of it, and he doesn’t try. He tells himself: “God will figure out what is going to happen on the top

of the mountain. I don’t know what the offering is. Maybe it’s Isaac. I don’t know. That’s up to God. But there’s something that is up to me.” What’s up to Abraham?

## Whose Father?

In order to see it, let’s look back at the beginning of their conversation, before Isaac inquired about the lamb. How does the conversation begin?

**Genesis 22:7**

ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק ֶאל-א ְב ָר ָהם ָא ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָא ִבי.

And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: ‘My father.’

We think there are at least two strange things about this verse. The first is the word ִביו אָ, “his father.” We already know that Abraham is Isaac’s father. Why does the Bible feel the need to remind us, to emphasize this obvious fact?

The second thing that stands out to us is the repetition of the word ּיֹאמֶר ַו , “and he said.” It seems redundant! The verse says: “And Isaac *said* to Abraham his father, and he said.” Why the repetition?

### PONDER THIS



What do you make of these incongruities, the Torah’s emphasis on “his father” and the repetition of the word “and he said”?

**It sounds to us** as if Isaac opened his mouth to speak but he couldn’t get the words out. The only thing that he could manage to say was: ִבי אָ, “my father.” That’s all he says. Isaac can only manage a single word, but he might as well be screaming: “Father! You’re my father! I’m your son! You’re supposed to protect me. That’s your job.

What is happening here? Where are we going?” Isaac is reminding his father, and reminding us as readers, of the uncomfortable truth. Abraham isn’t just a knight of faith on a noble quest. He’s a father, and he seems to be leading his son to the slaughter.

## State of Denial



### PONDER THIS

As difficult as it is, put yourself in Abraham’s shoes at this moment. You have somehow managed to submit yourself to a divine command to sacrifice your child, a command that goes against everything that you believe to be right and just. What would be going on in your mind right now?

Here’s what you *wouldn’t* be thinking about. You wouldn’t be thinking about your relationship with your son. You wouldn’t be thinking about your obligations to him as a parent. You’d have to be in denial. You’d be telling yourself: God told me to do this and I’m just following His will.

But in this moment, when Isaac utters that one word – “my father” – he is shining the spotlight on their relationship. If you are Isaac’s father and you hear that word from your son, how do you want to respond? You want to evade it somehow, to avoid facing the painful truth. You want to shut down emotionally, to maintain your precious façade of denial. You want to talk about anything other than your relationship as parent and child.

### LOOK INSIDE



With that in mind, consider Abraham’s response:

**Genesis 22:7**

ב ִני

ה ֶּנ ִּני

Here I am, my son

What do you make of it?

What is Abraham’s response to Isaac? He responds: “Here I am, my son” - in Hebrew, *hineni. Hineni* is an expression of total openness to the other, of complete readiness to embrace one’s commitments. Let’s imagine the scene. Abraham and Isaac are stopped on the path. Abraham looks up and he meets his son’s gaze. The two of them lock eyes. Abraham could have turned away, but he doesn’t. He doesn’t change the topic. He doesn’t brush it off. He doesn’t run from the relationship. He affirms: “Yes, I am your father and you are my son. I am here for you.”

## The Bullseye

We’re now in a position to return to our outstanding question. We said that the center of the chiasm is to be found somewhere in this conversation. Where is it?

Well, there are five instances of ּיֹאמֶר ַו , “and he said,” in this exchange. Abraham’s response of *hineni* is right in the middle.

*This* is the center of gravity around which the *akeida* revolves.

Indeed, verse 8 is not the only time we hear Abraham say *hineni* in this story. There are two other instances. He says it at the very beginning of the *akeida*, when God first speaks to him in verse 1:

**Genesis 22:1**

ֶה ֵאה,ּל ְו ָהאֱ לֹקים, ִנ ָּסה ֶאת-א ְב ָר ָהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ֵא ָליו, ַא ְב ָר ָהם ַו ּיֹא ֶמר הִ ֵּנ ִני.

ה ְ ּד ָב ִרים

ו ְי ִהי, ַא ַחר

And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: ‘Abraham’; and he said: ‘Here am I.’

And he says it again, towards the end of the account, when the angel of God calls out to him upon the mountain in verse 11:

**Genesis 22:11**

ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֵא ָליו ַמ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, ִמן-ה ָּׁש ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ַא ְב ָר ָהם ַא ְב ָר ָהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, הִ ֵּנ ִני.

And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said: ‘Abraham, Abraham.’ And he said: ‘Here am I.’

### PONDER THIS



*Hineni* is at the start, the middle, and the end of the akeida. What do you make of that?

To us, it suggests that the same readiness and commitment that Abraham shows to God, he shows to Isaac.

You see, the *akeida* isn’t just about Abraham’s commitment to God. We all know that Abraham is loyal to God, that he passed God’s test. That is explicit in the verses. But the *akeida* is also about Abraham’s commitment to Isaac, about Abraham’s loyalty to his own moral compass. That quiet moment shared between a father and son, that moment when the father could have run away from their relationship but didn’t: that’s the bullseye. That was another test, a test of Abraham’s devotion to his son, and he passed. That’s what the Bible wants us to read between the lines and see.

Abraham maintained his loyalty to God and to Isaac, even when his two worlds collided, even when it ceased to make any sense. “At the top of the mountain, God will have to figure it all out,” he must have told himself. “All I know is that I’m here for God, and I’m here for my son.” He stood unwavering in his commitments to God and to man. That was his greatness.



Vayeira: Abraham’s Struggle With Loyalty

Source Sheet | Page 1

**Genesis 22:1–19**

**בראשית כב:א–יט**

1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did

ְב ָר ָהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר את-א

ֶה ֵאה,ּל ְו ָהאֱ לֹקים, ִנ ָּסה

**א** ַו ְי ִהי, א ַחר ה ְ ּד ָב ִרים

prove Abraham, and said unto him: ‘Abraham’; and he said:

**ב** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ַקח-נא את- ִב ְנָך את- ְי ִחי ְדָךה ֵּנ ִני.

א ָליו, א ְב ָר ָהם ַו ּיֹא ֶמר

‘Here am I.’ **2** And He said: ‘Take now thy son, thine only

אל-א ֶרץ ה ּמֹ ִר ָ ּיה; ְו ַה ֲע ֵלהו ׁ ָשם,

א ׁ ֶשר-א ַה ְב ָּת, את- ִי ְצ ָחק, ְו ֶל ְך- ְלָך,

son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the

land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering

לעֹ ָלה, על א ַחד ה ָה ִרים, א ׁ ֶשר אֹ ַמר א ֶליָך. **ג** ַו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ֵּכם א ְב ָר ָהם ּב ּ ֹב ֶקר,

upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.’ **3** And

את-חמֹר ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח את- ׁש ֵני ְנ ָע ָריו א ּת ֹו, ְו ֵאת ִי ְצ ָחק ּבנ ֹו; ַו ְי ַב ַּקע,

ו ַ ּי ֲחב ׁש

Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass,

אל-ה ָּמקום א ׁ ֶשר-א ַמר- ָלהֹואֱ לֹקים. **ד** ב ּי ֹום

ע ֵצי עֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ָקם ַו ֵ ּי ֶל ְך,

and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his

ָּמקום--מ ָרחֹק. **ה** את-ה

את-עי ָניו ַו ַ ּי ְרא

ְב ָר ָהם א

ה ְּׁש ִלי ׁ ִשי, ַו ִ ּיָּ ׂשא

son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and

אל-נ ָע ָריו, ׁ ְשב ּו- ָל ֶכם ֹפה עם-ה ֲחמ ֹור, ַו ֲא ִני ְו ַה ַּנ ַער,

ְב ָר ָהם א

ו ּיֹא ֶמר

rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. **4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. **5** And Abraham said unto his young men: ‘Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come back to you.’ **6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it

נ ְל ָכה עד- ּכה; ְו ִנ ׁ ְש ַּת ֲח ֶוה, ְו ָנ ׁש ּו ָבה א ֵלי ֶכם. **ו** ַו ִ ּי ַּקח א ְב ָר ָהם את-ע ֵצי

העֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם על- ִי ְצ ָחק ּבנ ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ּב ָיד ֹו, את-ה ֵא ׁש ְו ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת;

ו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵני ֶהם, ַי ְח ָ ּדו. **ז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק אל-א ְב ָר ָהם א ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר א ִבי,

ו ּיֹא ֶמר, ה ֶּנ ִּני ב ִני; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ה ֵּנה ה ֵא ׁש ְו ָה ֵע ִצים, ְו ַא ֵ ּיה הֶּ ׂשה, לעֹ ָלה. **ח**

או ֶּימר, א ְב ָר ָהם, אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו הֶּ ׂשה לעֹ ָלה, ּב ִני; ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵני ֶהם,

upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the

א ׁ ֶשר א ַמר- ָלהֹואֱ לֹקים, ַו ִ ּי ֶבן ׁ ָשם

יחְ ָ ּדו. **ט** ַו ָ ּיבאו, אל-ה ָּמקום

knife; and they went, both of them, together. **7** And Isaac

את-ה ֵע ִצים; ַו ַ ּי ֲעקֹד, את- ִי ְצ ָחק ּבנ ֹו,

א ְב ָר ָהם את-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ַו ַ ּי ֲערֹ ְך

spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: ‘My father.’ And

ָיד ֹו, את-

ְב ָר ָהם א

ו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם אֹת ֹו על-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, מ ַּמ ַעל ל ֵע ִצים. **י** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח

he said: ‘Here am I, my son.’ And he said: ‘Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’ **8** And Abraham said: ‘God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’ And they went, both of them, together. **9** And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. **10** And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

And when you do, please remember to support Aleph Beta. Nothing makes us happier than bringing eye-opening, soul-heartening, life-changing Torah directly to you — but it all costs money. Like the cost of the writing, editing, design and circulation of the guide that you’re reading. So until we win the lottery, we need your support. Encourage your friends to subscribe to Aleph Beta, so they can get the guides sent directly to them! Or if you shared it with a friend and it was an awesome experience for both of you, consider making a small donation to show your love.

Thanks for understanding - we love you guys, too.

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Then SHARE and SUPPORT!

ְבנ ֹו. את-

ל ׁ ְשחֹט,

ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת, את-ה

ו ִ ּי ַּקח

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Vayeira: Abraham’s Struggle With Loyalty

Source Sheet | Page 2

**11** And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of

ְב ָר ָהם; א

ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, א ְב ָר ָהם מן-ה ָּׁש

**יא** ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא א ָליו מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה,

heaven, and said: ‘Abraham, Abraham.’ And he said: ‘Here am I.’ **12** And he said: ‘Lay not thy hand upon the lad,

ו ּיֹאמֶר, ה ֵּנ ִני. **יב** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, אל- ּת ׁ ְש ַלח ָי ְדָך אל-ה ַּנ ַער, ְו ַאל- ּת ַעש ל ֹו, מאו ָמה: ּכי ע ָּתה ָי ַ ִד ְיע, ּ ִּתכי- ְי ֵרא אֱ לֹקים א ָּתה, ְולֹא ח ַ ׂש ְכ ָּת את- ִב ְנָך

neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man, seeing thou hast not withheld

א ְב ָר ָהם את-עי ָניו, ַו ַ ּי ְרא ְו ִה ֵּנה-א ִיל, א ַחר, א ְב ָר ָהם ַו ִ ּי ַּקח את-ה ַא ִיל, ַו ַ ּי ֲע ֵלהו לעֹ ָלה

ְך מ ֶּמ ִּני. **יג** ַו ִ ּיָּ ׂשא ּב ַק ְר ָניו; ַו ֵ ּי ֶל

את- ְי ִחי ְדָך,

נאֱ חז ּב ְּס ַב ְך

thy son, thine only son, from Me.’ **13** And Abraham lifted

ההוא, ְיקוה ִי ְר ֶאה, א ׁ ֶשר

ּבנ ֹו. **יד** ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא א ְב ָר ָהם ׁ ֵשם-ה ָּמקום

ַתחַת

up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and

took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the

י ָא ֵמר ה ּי ֹום, ּב ַהר ְיקוה ֵי ָר ֶאה. **טו** ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, אל-א ְב ָר ָהם, ֵש ִנית, מִן- ַה ָּׁשמָ ִים. **טז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ּבי ִנ ׁ ְש ַּב ְע ִּתי ְנ ֻאם- ְיקוה: ּכי, ַי ַען א ׁ ֶשר

stead of his son. **14** And Abraham called the name of that

ִב ְנָך את- ְי ִחי ֶדָך. **יז** ּכי-ב ֵר ְך את-

ה ֶ ּזה, ְולֹא ח ַ ׂש ְכ ָּת,

ע ִ ׂשי ָת את-ה ָ ּד ָבר

place Adonai-jireh; as it is said to this day: ‘In the mount where the LORD is seen.’ **15** And the angel of the LORD

ֹו ֵיי א ָב ֶר ְכָך, ְו ַה ְר ָּבה א ְר ֶּבה את-ז ְר ֲעָך ּככ ֹו ְכ ֵבי ה ָּׁש ַמ ִים, ְו ַכחול, א ׁ ֶשר על- ׂש ַפת ה ָ ּים; ְו ִי ַר ׁש ַז ְר ֲעָך, את ׁ ַש ַער אֹ ְי ָביו. **יח** ְו ִה ְת ָּב ְרכ ּו ב ַז ְר ֲעָך, ֹכל ג

called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, **16** and

ע ֶקב, א ׁ ֶשר ׁ ָש ַמ ְע ָּת ּבקֹ ִלי. **יט** ַו ָ ּי ׁ ָשב א ְב ָר ָהם אל-נ ָע ָריו, ַו ָ ּי ֻקמ ּו

ה ָא ֶרץ,

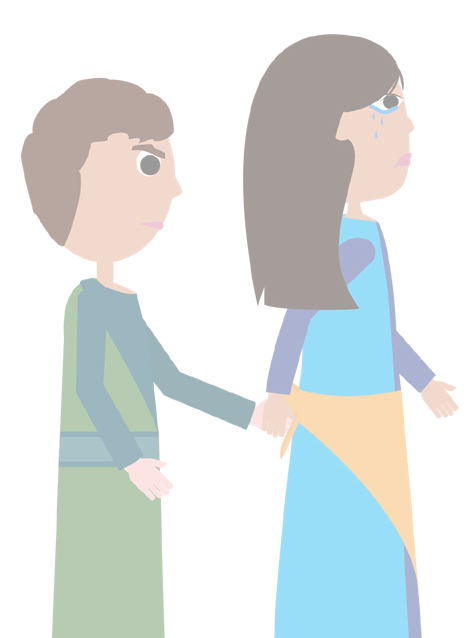
said: ‘By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, **17** that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the

heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; **18** and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

because thou hast hearkened to My voice.’ **19** So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

אל- ְב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע; ַו ֵ ּי ׁ ֶשב א ְב ָר ָהם, ּב ְב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע.

ו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ַי ְח ָ ּדו



**VAYEIRA: ABRAM, SARAI, HAGAR, ISHMAEL AND...EXODUS?**

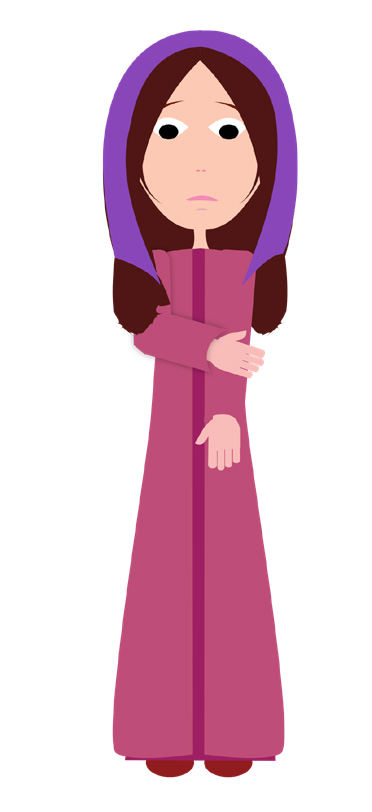
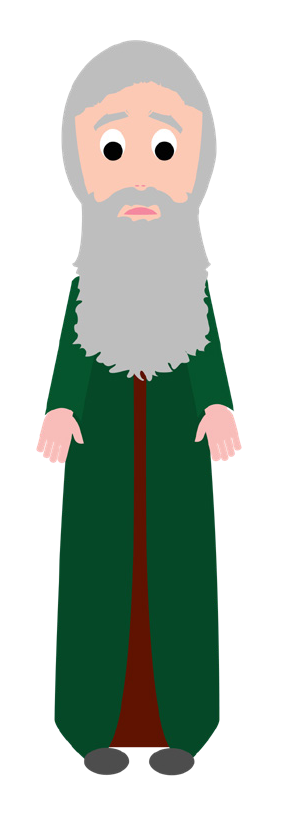
Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Vayeira!

## Learning From Our Forebears

We want to tackle a difficult and painful story: the saga of Abraham, Sarah1, and their maidservant Hagar. In *Parshat Lech Lecha*, the Torah told us that Sarah oppressed Hagar, that she dealt harshly with her.2 And it doesn’t get much better in *Parshat Vayeira*: Sarah wants Hagar thrown out of the house, expelled from the family - and Abraham dutifully obeys.

Hagar and her son Ishmael are cast out of Abraham’s home and they wander in the desert, narrowly escaping death by thirst.3

These stories do not paint our forebears - Abraham and Sarah - in the rosiest of lights. Indeed, the medieval commentator Nachmanides takes them to task for their treatment of Hagar, calling it a sin.4 The question you have to ask is: why is this something the Torah chooses to tell us about? What is the Torah trying to teach us by focusing on this story?



We may be used to seeing our biblical patriarchs and matriarchs as paragons of virtue - and in many ways, that is absolutely true. But we want to raise the possibility that those same patriarchs and matriarchs made mistakes, and that the Torah shares their stories with us so that we can learn from their errors.5 Indeed, in telling the

story of Hagar, the Torah is warning us about something that we - as a nation - need to be especially careful about. For while this story seems like an isolated tale, it has ripple effects throughout the Torah. Let’s take a look at the verses and we’ll see it for ourselves.

## A Curious Connection

The story begins in Genesis Chapter 16, where we are first introduced to Hagar:

**Genesis 16:1-2**

ָצ ַר ִני ְיקוה ִמ ֶּל ֶדת-- ּבא-נא ֶאל- ׁש ְפ ָח ִתי, או ַלי ִא ָּב ֶנה ה ֵּנה-נא ֲע

ׂש ַרי ֶאל-א ְב ָרם,

ָגר. ַו ּתֹא ֶמר ה

ו ָ ׂש ַרי ֵא ׁ ֶשת ַא ְב ָרם, לֹא ָי ְל ָדה ל ֹו; ְו ָל ּה ׁ ִש ְפ ָחה ִמ ְצ ִרית, ּו ׁ ְש ָמ ּה

ׂש ָרי.

לקול

מ ֶּמ ָּנה; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע ַא ְב ָרם,

Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, “Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her.” And Abram heeded Sarai’s request.

1 We use the names “Abraham” and “Sarah” throughout this guide, although they are not technically given those names until Genesis 17.

2 Genesis 16

3 Genesis 21

4 See Nachmanides (Ramban) to Genesis 16:6

5 That being said, perhaps this “sin” of Abraham and Sarah is more subtle than it appears. Rabbi Fohrman explores this possibility in his audio epilogue to the video, “*Vayeira:* Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?”, available at [www.alephbeta.org.](http://www.alephbeta.org/)

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of

Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Vayeira: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

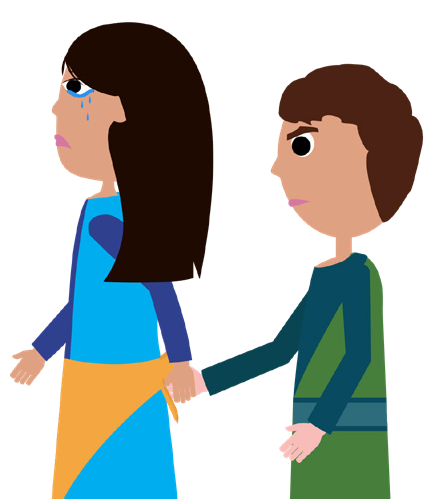
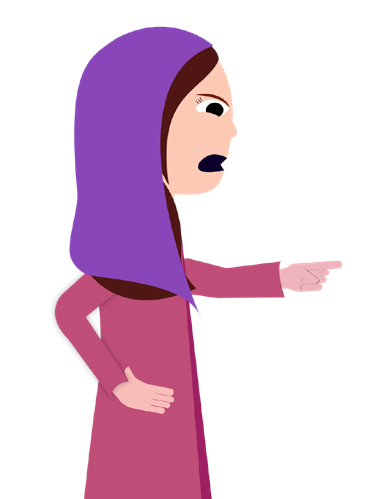
Despairing at her own barrenness and eager to see her husband have a child, Sarah instructs Abraham to marry her maidservant Hagar and have a child with her. But no sooner than Hagar conceives does she begin to disdain her ostensible mistress. Sarah is infuriated by Hagar’s disrespect. She complains to Abraham and he tells her, “Deal with her as you think right.” So what does Sarah do?

**Genesis 16:6**

ׂשרַי, ַו ִּת ְברַח ִמ ָּפ ֶני ָה

##### ו ְּתעַ ֶּנ ָה

And Sarai **oppressed** her, and [Hagar] ran away from her



Note that first word - ָה ֶּנ ְּתעַ ַו (“she oppressed her”). This isn’t the first time we heard about “oppression “ in the Torah. Indeed, if you go back only a dozen verses, we heard about another “oppression.” It was part of the *Brit Bein haBetarim*, the Covenant of the Parts: a prophecy in which God appeared to Abraham and revealed something shocking:

**Genesis 16:6**

ּב ֶא ֶרץ לֹא ָל ֶהם, ַו ֲע ָבד ּום, **ְועִ ּנ ּו** אֹ ָתם--א ְר ַּבע ֵמאות, ׁ ָש ָנה.

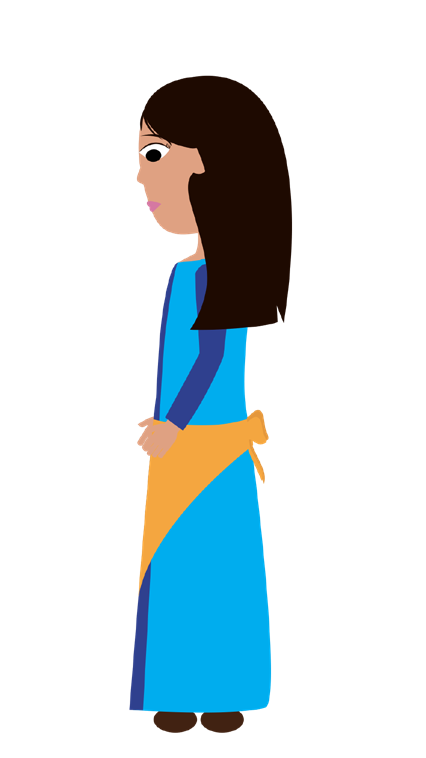
ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך ּכי-גר

ָרם, ָידֹ ַע ֵּת ַדע ל ַא ְב

ו ּיֹא ֶמר

And [God] said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and **oppressed** four hundred years…

Look at that - the same word, only a few verses apart. By using the same word in these two places, it seems like the Torah is trying to draw a connection between the oppression that Hagar experiences and the



oppression that Abraham’s descendants will experience… the oppression of Egyptian servitude.6

Well, isn’t that interesting? God ordains that Abraham’s descendants will toil in Egyptian servitude… and in the very next chapter, we meet an *Egyptian* woman who experiences servitude in Abraham’s house. Two instances of עינוי, oppression: first Abraham’s descendants and now Hagar.

Speaking of which, let’s talk about Hagar’s name. What else does *hey-gimmel-res*h (הגר) spell? It spells ֵּגר הַ (*ha-ger*) - “the stranger.” Does that word ring any bells for you?

**Genesis 15:3**

ֶרץ לֹא ָל ֶהם ּב ֶא

**גֵר** ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך

Your offspring shall be **strangers** in a land not theirs

That was the first part of the prophecy in the *Brit Bein haBetarim*: Abraham’s descendants would be “strangers” in a foreign land, the land of their ultimate oppression - the land of Egypt.

It’s hard to ignore the implications: Hagar felt herself to be a stranger in Abraham’s house. She endured oppression. Now, Abraham’s children would be strangers in Hagar’s “household” - in Egypt. They too would know what it feels like to be oppressed. It seems that right here in Chapter 16 in the Book of Genesis, we’re beginning to get the hints of a gathering storm. Egyptian slavery doesn’t come out of nowhere. There are seeds. This tale with Hagar, the way that Abraham and Sarah treat her: it seems to be one of those seeds.

## Hagar’s Exodus

But wait: are we getting ahead of ourselves? Is there any more evidence that supports this connection between the treatment of Hagar and the Israelites’ experience in Egypt?

As a matter of fact, there is. As you continue to read Hagar’s tale, you find that it is riddled with clues. Consider the tale of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis Chapter 21. Let’s review the verses, and as we do, ask yourself: “What does this story remind you of?”

**Genesis 21:9-10**

ּזֹאת, ִעם- ְב ִני ה

ָא ָמה ּבן-ה

לֹא ִיי ַר ׁש ּכי

ּזֹאת, ְו ֶאת- ְב ָנ ּה: ה

ָא ָמה ה

ְב ָר ָהם, ָּג ֵר ׁש ל ַא

ָר ָהם--מ ַצ ֵחק. ַו ּתֹא ֶמר, ל ַא ְב

ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית, ֲא ׁ ֶשר- ָי ְל ָדה

ׂש ָרה ֶאת- ֶבן-ה ָגר

ו ֵּת ֶרא

ִעם- ִי ְצ ָחק.

Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham making sport. She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

6 Granted, God doesn’t explicitly mention Egypt in the *Brit bein haBetarim*, but if you’ve read the rest of the Torah, you know that that’s how the story ultimately plays out.

Sarah finally gives birth to her own biological child, Isaac - and when he finds Ishmael taunting him, she decides that Ishmael - and Hagar - must go. God concurs, and Abraham wakes up early to send them from the house:

**Genesis 2114-17**

ְּב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע. ַו ִ ּי ְכל ּו ה ַּמ ִים, ִמן-

ְד ַּבר ּב ִמ

ּב ּ ֹב ֶקר ַו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ְו ֵח ַמת ַמ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן ֶאל-ה ָגר ׂשם ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה, ְו ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד--ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּל ֶח ָה; ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ַתע,

ו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ֵּכם ַא ְב ָר ָהם

ה ָ ּי ֶלד; ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ִמ ֶּנ ֶגד, ַו ִּת ָּ ׂשא ֶאת-

ה ִּ ׂשי ִחם. ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ָל ּה ִמ ֶּנ ֶגד, ה ְר ֵחק ּכ ְמ ַט ֲח ֵוי ֶק ׁ ֶשת, ּכי ָא ְמ ָרה, ַאל-א ְר ֶאה ּבמ ֹות

ה ֵח ֶמת; ַו ַּת ׁ ְש ֵל ְך ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד, ַּת ַחת ַא ַחד

ַמע ֱאלֹקים ֶאל-קול ה ַּנ ַער ּכי- ׁש

ָגר; ַאל- ּתי ְר ִאי, ה

קֹ ָל ּה ַו ֵּת ְב ְּך. ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע ֱאלֹקים, ֶאת-קול ה ַּנ ַער, ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ַמ ְל ַא ְך ֱאלֹקים ֶאל-ה ָגר ִמן-ה ׁ ָּש ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָל ּה ַמה- ָּל ְך

ַּב ֲא ׁ ֶשר הוא- ׁשם.

Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them on her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears. God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar?

Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is.”



What does this story remind you of?

Hagar left servitude and entered a forbidden wilderness, a *midbar.* Who else left servitude and entered a *midbar*? That’s what *we* did, as a nation, when we left Egypt - Hagar’s homeland - after all those centuries of slavery. What happened to Hagar when she left? She lost her way; she was just wandering around the desert. What happened to the Israelites when they left Egypt?

**Exodus 14:3**

ה ִּמ ְד ָּבר.

ַגר ֲע ֵלי ֶהם, ס

ָא ֶרץ; ּב

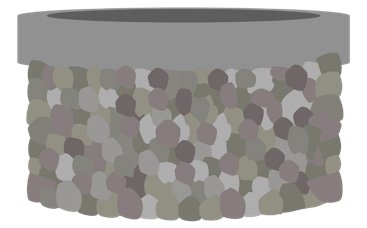
ל ְב ֵני ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל, ְנ ֻב ִכים הם

ו ָא ַמר ַּפ ְרעֹה

Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.”

*We* also got lost in the desert.

What happened next to Hagar? She experienced a water crisis. Her water canteen ran out. She expected that she and her child would die of thirst. But an angel interceded for Hagar and Ishmael, and God pointed the way to a well where they could drink.7 Did anything like that happen to the children



of Israel? It surely did; they too experienced a water crisis. After crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites went three days without any water. But just as Ishmael and Hagar experienced a miraculous relief from their thirst, so too did the Israelites. God instructed Moses to cast a branch into a bitter oasis and the waters became sweet, allowing the people to drink.8

And, back when the angel had interceded for Hagar, he told her:

7 Genesis 21:17-19

8 Exodus 15:22-25

**Genesis 21:17**

אַל- ִּתי ְראִי

Do not fear!

What does Moses tell the people on their way out of Egypt, right before the splitting of the Red Sea?

**Exodus 14:13**

ַאל- ּתי ָראו

Do not fear!

And if you’re still not persuaded that there are bona fide connections here, think back to that moment when Abraham first sent Hagar out of the house:

**Genesis 21:14**

##### ׂשם ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה

ו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ְו ֵח ַמת ַמ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן ֶאל-ה ָגר

And [Abraham] took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them **on her shoulder**

When else do we have someone leaving a place with bread on their shoulders?

**Exodus 12:33-34**

ּב ִ ׂש ְמלֹ ָתם, **ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמם.**

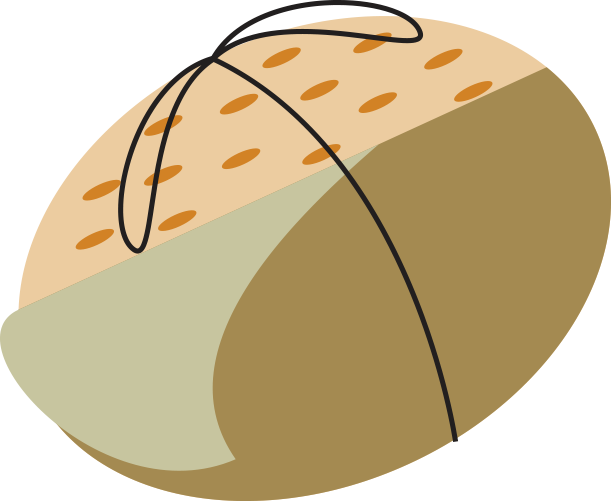
ה ָעם ֶאת- ְב ֵצקו, ֶט ֶרם ֶי ְח ָמץ; ִמ ׁ ְש ֲארֹ ָתם ְצ ֻררֹת

ל ׁ ַש ְּל ָחם ִמן-ה ָא ֶרץ… ַו ִ ּי ָּ ׂשא

ַמ ֵהר ל

ו ֶּת ֱח ַזק ִמ ְצ ַר ִים ַעל-ה ָעם,

The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country… So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks **on their shoulders.**

Bread on their shoulders: that’s how the Israelites carried their matzah when they departed from Egypt, from the house of slavery.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **HAGAR** | **ABRAHAM’S DESCENDANTS** |
| Experiences oppression (עינוי) in Abraham’s household | Experience oppression (עינוי) in Hagar’s “household” (ie Egypt) |
| Name means “the stranger” (גר–ה) | Referred to as “strangers” (גרים) |
| Kicked out into the desert (מדבר) | Kicked out into the desert (מדבר) |
| Gets lost | Get lost |
| Experiences a water crisis | Experience a water crisis |
| Thirst is miraculously quenched | Thirst is miraculously quenched |
| Told not to fear (תיראי אל) | Told not to fear (תיראו אל) |
| Leaves with bread on shoulders | Leaves with bread on shoulders |

## Strangers of Today

In these stories of Hagar and Ishmael, we have the beginning of seeds that come into scary fruition in the Book of Exodus - but seeds that presage our *redemption* as well. Hagar’s experience of oppression: we can hear its echoes in Israelite enslavement, as well as the Exodus from Egypt itself. And the connections don’t end with Egypt. Where else in the Torah do we find mention of הגר (“*ha-ger*”) the stranger?

The answer is: all over the place! Over and over again, the Torah exhorts us to care for the stranger, not to wrong or oppress the stranger - because we *were* strangers, because we know what it feels like.9

In a certain sense, the Exodus from Egypt was all about “us”: the birth of *our* nation, the creation of the Israelites as a distinct and unique entity among peoples. But at the same time, it was the exact opposite: the experience was meant to sensitize us to the plight of the stranger - to those people who don’t quite fit into our nation, who feel like the “other” in our midst. The Torah wanted us to walk out of Egypt with a profound empathy for those who don’t belong. That empathy could have - and should have - begun with the treatment of Hagar.

You see, the Torah is a *guidebook*. It doesn’t just highlight the mistakes of our forefathers and foremothers for no reason; we are meant to actually learn things from these stories.

So what’s the lesson for us today? Even if we can’t remember the last time we threw our maidservant out of our house, we still have strangers in our lives. For one thing, the word *ger* is used to refer to converts. How do we welcome

converts? A *ger* can also be someone who doesn’t share our faith, but is a good and moral person in our midst. How do we treat those people? When you’re walking down the street, do you smile and say “hello” to people who are different than you? Or only to those who are like you?

The Torah doesn’t merely ask that we love our *neighbor* as we love ourselves. It also demands that we love the stranger.

9 For example, see Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 10:19



Vayera: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?

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##### Genesis 15:13

**13** And [God] said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

**Genesis 16:1-11**

ֶהם, ל

ֶא ֶרץ לֹא ּב

ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך ּכי-גר

מאות, ׁ ָש ָנה.

**בראשית טו:יג**

**יג** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ַא ְב ָרם, ָידֹ ַע ֵת ַדע

ו ֲע ָבד ּום, ְו ִע ּנ ּו אֹ ָתם--א ְר ַּבע

#### בראשית טז:א–יא

**1** Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. **2** And

ה ָגר.

אל-

א ְב ָרם, לֹא ָי ְל ָדה ל ֹו; ְו ָל ּה ׁ ִש ְפ ָחה מ ְצ ִרית, ו ׁ ְש ָמ ּה ְב ָרם, ה ֵּנה-נא ע ָצ ַר ִני ְיקוה מ ֶּל ֶדת-- ּבא-נא אל-א

**א** ְו ָ ׂש ַרי א ׁ ֶשת

**ב** ַו ּתֹא ֶמר ׂש ַרי

Sarai said to Abram, “Look, the LORD has kept me from

לקול ׂש ָרי. **ג** ַו ִּת ַּקח ׂשרַי

מ ֶּמ ָּנה; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע א ְב ָרם,

ָּב ֶנה א

ִש ְפ ָח ִתי, או ַלי

bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a

son through her.” And Abram heeded Sarai’s request. **3** So

ע ֶ ׂשר ׁ ָש ִנים, ל ׁ ֶש ֶבת

את-ה ָגר ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ָת ּה, מ ֵּקץ

א ׁ ֶשת-א ְב ָרם,

Sarai, Abram’s wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—

ל ִא ׁ ָּשה. **ד** וַ ָ ּיבא

ּכ ָנ ַען; ַו ִּת ֵּתן אֹ ָת ּה ל ַא ְב ָרם אי ׁ ָש ּה, ל ֹו

א ְב ָרם ּב ֶא ֶרץ

after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years— and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. **4** He

ַו ֵּת ַקל ְּג ִב ְר ָּת ּה ּב ֵעי ֶני ָה. **ה** ַו ּתֹאמֶר ָנ ַת ִּתי ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ִתי ּב ֵחי ֶק ָך, ַו ֵּת ֶרא ּכי ה ָר ָתה, ע ֶלי ָך--א ֹנ ִכי

אל-ה ָגר, ַו ַּת ַהר; ַו ֵּת ֶרא

ׂש ַרי אל-א ְב ָרם, ח ָמ ִסי

cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she

ֶני ָך. **ו** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר א ְב ָרם ו ֵבי

ּב ֵעי ֶני ָה; ִי ׁ ְש ּ ֹפט ְיקוה, ּבי ִני

ּכי ה ָר ָתה ָו ֵא ַקל

saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in

ּב ָי ֵד ְך--ע ִ ׂשי- ָל ּה, ה ּט ֹוב ּב ֵעי ָנ ִי ְך; ַו ְּת ַע ֶּנ ָה ׂש ַרי,

אל- ָש ַרי, ה ֵּנה ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ֵת ְך

her esteem. **5** And Sarai said to Abram, “The wrong done

ְיקוה, על-עין ה ַּמ ִים-- ַב ִּמ ְד ָּבר: מ ְל ַא ְך

ו ִּת ְב ַרח מִ ָּפ ֶני ָה. **ז** ַו ִ ּי ְמ ָצ ָא ּה

me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now

that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her

על-ה ַע ִין, ּב ֶד ֶר ְך ׁש ּור. **ח** ַו ּיֹא ַמר, ה ָגר ׁ ִש ְפ ַחת ׂש ַרי אי-מ ֶ ּזה באת--

esteem. The LORD decide between you and me!” **6** Abram

ּה ל

ת ֵל ִכי; ַו ּתֹא ֶמר--מ ְּפ ֵני ׂש ַרי ְּג ִב ְר ִּתי, א ֹנ ִכי ֹב ַר ַחת. **ט** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר

ו ָא ָנה

said to Sarai, “Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right.” Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she

ּה ל

ׁש ּו ִבי אל- ְג ִב ְר ֵּת ְך, ְו ִה ְת ַע ִּני, ַת ַחת ָי ֶדי ָה. **י** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ּה ְר ָּבה א ְר ֶּבה את-ז ְר ֵע ְך, ְולֹא ִי ָּס ֵפר, מ ֹרב. **יא** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, ה

ran away from her. **7** An angel of the LORD found her by a

ה ָרה ְויֹ ַל ְד ְּת ּבן, ְו ָק ָראת ׁ ְשמ ֹו ִי ׁ ְש ָמ ֵעאל, ּכי- ׁש ַמע

מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, ה ָּנ ְך

spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, **8** and said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” And she said, “I am running away from my mistress Sarai.” **9** And the angel

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Vayera: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?

Source Sheet Page 2

of the LORD said to her, “Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment.” **10** And the angel of the LORD said to her, “I will greatly increase your offspring, And they shall be too many to count.” **11** The angel of the LORD said to her further, “Behold, you are with child And shall bear a son; You shall call him Ishmael, For the LORD has paid heed to your suffering.

##### Nachmanides on Genesis 16:6

**And Sarai oppressed her and she fled from her presence (literally “face”):** Our mother sinned in this oppression, and also Abraham in permitting her to do so. And Hashem heard her [Hagar’s] oppression and gave her a son who would be a wild ass of a man to oppress the descendants of Abraham and Sarah in all kinds of oppression.

**Genesis 21:9–19**

#### רמב”ן על בראשית טז:ו

**ותענה שרי ותברח מפניה** - חטאה אמנו בענוי הזה וגם אברהם

בהניחו לעשות כן ושמע ה’ אל עניה ונתן לה בן שיהא פרא אדם

לענות זרע אברהם ושרה בכל מיני הענוי

#### בראשית כא:ט–יט

**9** Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne

ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית, א ׁ ֶשר- ָי ְל ָדה ל ַא ְב ָר ָהם--מ ַצ ֵחק.

ׂש ָרה את- ֶבן-ה ָגר

**ט** ַו ֵּת ֶרא

to Abraham playing. **10** She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave

ָּג ֵר ׁש ה ָא ָמה ה ּזֹאת, ְו ֶאת- ְב ָנ ּה: ּכי לֹא ִיי ַר ׁש ְב ִני עם- ִי ְצ ָחק. **יא** ַו ֵ ּי ַרע ה ָ ּד ָבר מאֹד, ּב ֵעי ֵני ל ַא ְב ָר ָהם, ה ּזֹאת, עם-

**י** ַו ּתֹא ֶמר,

ּבן-ה ָא ָמה

shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.” **11**

The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. **12** But God said to Abraham, “Do not be

distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring

ָהם, על, אודֹת ּבנ ֹו. **יב** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר אלֹקים אל-א ְב ָר ָהם, אל- ֵי ַרע ָך על-ה ַּנ ַער ְו ַעל-א ָמ ֶת ָך-- ּכל א ׁ ֶשר תֹא ַמר א ֶלי ָך ׂש ָרה, ׁ ְש ַמע א ְב ָר ִי ְצ ָחק, ִי ָּק ֵרא ל ָך ָז ַרע. **יג** ְו ַגם את- ֶבן-ה ָא ָמה, לג ֹוי ּב ֵעי ֶני ַז ְר ֲע ָך, הוא. **יד** ַו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ֵּכם א ְב ָר ָהם ּב ּ ֹב ֶקר ַו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ּבקֹ ָל ּה: ּכי ב א ִ ׂשי ֶמ ּנ ּו: ּכי

shall be continued for you. **13** As for the son of the slave-

אל-ה ָגר ׂשם על- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה, ְו ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד--ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּל ֶח ָה;

ו ֵח ַמת מ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן

woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed.” **14** Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. **15** When the water was gone from the skin,

ו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ַתע, ּב ִמ ְד ַּבר ּב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע. **טו** ַו ִ ּי ְכל ּו ה ַּמ ִים, מן-ה ֵח ֶמת;

ו ַּת ׁ ְש ֵל ְך את-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד, ַת ַחת א ַחד ה ִּ ׂשי ִחם. **טז** ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ל ּה מ ֶּנ ֶגד, ה ְר ֵחק ּכ ְמ ַט ֲח ֵוי ֶק ׁ ֶשת, ּכי א ְמ ָרה, אל-א ְר ֶאה ּבמ ֹות ה ָ ּי ֶלד; ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב

מ ֶּנ ֶגד, ַו ִּת ָּ ׂשא את-קֹ ָל ּה ַו ֵּת ְב ְּך. **יז** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע אלֹקים, את-קול ה ַּנ ַער,

ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא מ ְל ַא ְך אלֹקים אל-ה ָגר מן-ה ׁ ָּש ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ּה מה- ָּל ְך ה ָגר;

she left the child under one of the bushes, **16** and went

ּב ֲא ׁ ֶשר הוא- ׁשם. **יח**

ה ַּנ ַער אל-קול

ׁש ַמע אלֹקים ּכי-

אל- ּתי ְר ִאי,

and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she

את- ָי ֵד ְך ב ֹו: ּכי- ְלג ֹוי ָּגד ֹול, א ִ ׂשי ֶמ ּנ ּו.

ַּנ ַער, ְו ַה ֲח ִזי ִקי את-ה

קו ִמי ׂש ִאי

thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting

ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ְּת ַמ ֵּלא את- מ ִים; ַו

ֵאר ּב

**יט** ַו ִ ּי ְפ ַקח אלֹקים את-עי ֶני ָה, ַו ֵּת ֶרא

thus afar, she burst into tears. **17** God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. **18** Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great

מ ִים, ַו ַּת ׁ ְש ְק, את-ה ָּנ ַער.

ה ֵח ֶמת,



Vayera: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?

Source Sheet Page 2

nation of him.” **19** Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink.

##### Exodus 12:34

**34** So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders.

**Exodus 14:3**

ּב ִ ׂש ְמלֹ ָתם,

צ ֻררֹת

מ ׁ ְש ֲארֹ ָתם

ֶרם ֶי ְח ָמץ; ט

ְב ֵצקו, את-

#### שמות יב:לד

**לד** ַו ִ ּי ָּ ׂשא ה ָעם

ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמם.

#### שמות יד:ג

**3** Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.”

ִּמ ְד ָּבר. ה

ֵלי ֶהם, ע

ס ַגר

ָא ֶרץ; ּב

ל ְב ֵני ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל, ְנ ֻב ִכים הם

ְרעֹה ַפ

**ג** ְו ָא ַמר

##### Exodus 14:13

**13** But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by,

את- ְי ׁש ּו ַעת ו ְראו

אל-ה ָעם, אל- ּתי ָראו--ה ְת ַי ְ ּצב ּו

#### שמות יד:יג

**יג** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר מֹ ׁ ֶשה

and witness the deliverance which the LORD will work for

ְצ ַר ִים ה ּי ֹום-- את-מ

ה ּי ֹום: ּכי, א ׁ ֶשר ְר ִאי ֶתם

יקוה, א ׁ ֶשר- ַי ֲע ֶ ׂשה ל ֶכם

you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again.

ֹו ָלם. עד-ע

ְראֹ ָתם ע ֹוד, ל

לֹא תֹ ִספו

**Exodus 23:9**

#### שמות כג:ט

**9** You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the

ִיי ֶתם, ה

ֵּגר-- ִכי-ג ִרים ה

ֶפ ׁש את-נ

ְו ֵגר, לֹא ת ְל ָחץ; ְו ַא ֶּתם, ְי ַד ְע ֶּתם **ט**

feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

מ ְצרָ ִים.

ּב ֶארֶץ

**Deuteronomy 10:19**

#### דברים י:יט

**19** You must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

ְצ ָר ִים. מ

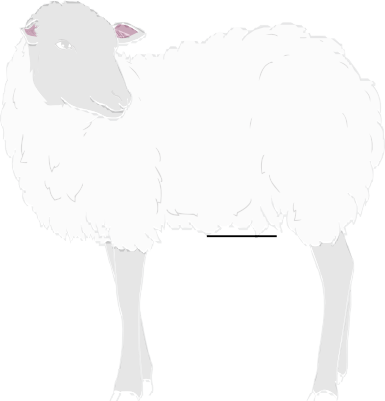
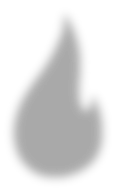
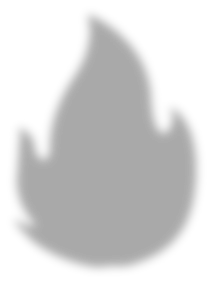
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ִיי ֶתם, ה

ִרים ּכי-ג

ֵּגר: את-ה

**יט** ו ֲא ַה ְב ֶּתם,



**VAYEIRA: ABRAHAM’S STRUGGLE WITH LOYALTY**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Vayeira!

## Understanding the Akeida

This week’s parsha contains one of the most difficult stories in the entire Torah: the *akeida*, the binding of Isaac. It’s a father’s worst nightmare: God comes to Abraham and commands him to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. It’s

troubling, even twisted, and certainly difficult to read… and yet there it is in the Torah, in the pages of God’s book. How do we make any sense of it?

### PONDER THIS



What do you think we’re supposed to learn from the *akeida*? What do you find troubling about it? What are some of the explanations that you’ve heard of this story? Do they resonate with you? Why or why not?

One possible lesson is: we should surrender completely to God’s will, no matter the command, no matter the cost. In a toss up between a divine command and our intuitive notions of morality, there’s no contest: God’s authority trumps all else.

So imagine that God commands you to do something, say, to harm one of your loved ones… and your gut, your conscience, tells you that it’s wrong. Your job is to suppress that gut instinct, right? That’s what Abraham’s example is coming to teach us… right? After all, you’re not the judge of right and wrong - God is. God wills it, so, end of story… right?

Viewed in this light, the *akeida* is a pure test of faith, intended to see whether Avraham will be steadfast in his devotion to God – or whether he will flounder and give in to his love for his son.

That’s one way to read it. But we think that narrative misses a big part of the story. We want to argue that the *akeida* is more than a test of faith; it’s about more than Abraham’s loyalty to God.

So what is the *akeida* about? Let’s dive into the text and see.

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Vayeira: Abraham’s Struggle With Loyalty” (available for

viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

## The Search Begins

**LOOK INSIDE: The *akeida***



We want to draw your attention to a fascinating pattern in the text of the *akeida* which we reveals what it’s really “about.” To see it, we’re going to jump right into the middle of the account. (If you want to read

through the whole story of the *akeida*, you can find it on your Source Sheet). Read the verses below. Do you notice any patterns? Are there any words or phrases which repeat?

**Genesis 22:6–10**

**6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and

העֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם ַעל- ִי ְצ ָחק

##### בראשית כב:ו–י

**ו** ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ע ֵצי

laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire

ּב ָיד ֹו, ֶאת-ה ֵא ׁש ְו ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת; ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו

ּבנ ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח

and the knife; and they went, both of them, together. **7** And

ְש ֵני ֶהם, ַיחְ ָ ּדו. **ז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק ֶאל-א ְב ָר ָהם ָא ִביו,

Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: ‘My father.’

ה ֵא ׁש

ה ֵּנה

ִני; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ב

ֶּנ ִּני ה

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ָא ִבי, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר,

And he said: ‘Here am I, my son.’ And he said: ‘Behold the fire

**ח** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ַא ְב ָר ָהם,לעֹ ָלה.

הֶּ ׂשה,

ו ָה ֵע ִצים, ְו ַא ֵ ּיה

and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’

ּב ִני; ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵני ֶהם,

ָלה, לעֹ

הֶּ ׂשה

אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו

**8** And Abraham said: ‘God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’ And they went, both of them,

יחְ ָ ּדו. **ט** ַו ָ ּיבאו, ֶאל-ה ָּמקום ֲא ׁ ֶשר ָא ַמר-ל ֹו

האֱ לֹקים, ַו ִ ּי ֶבן ׁ ָשם ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ַו ַ ּי ֲערֹ ְך

together. **9** And they came to the place which God had told

ּבנ ֹו, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם אֹת ֹו

את-ה ֵע ִצים; ַו ַ ּי ֲעקֹד, ֶאת- ִי ְצ ָחק

him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood

על-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ִמ ַּמ ַעל ָל ֵע ִצים. **י** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח ַא ְב ָר ָהם

in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. **10** And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

ל ׁ ְשחֹט, ֶאת- ְבנ ֹו.

את- ָיד ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת,

If you look at verses 6 and 8, you’ll see that they end with the exact same phrase:

**Genesis 22:6**

ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵני ֶהם ַי ְח ָ ּדו

and they went, both of them, together

Now, it’s not unusual for the Bible to repeat a phrase if it’s an important part of the story line. But here, it doesn’t seem to add much. Think about it this way: if you didn’t have the second “and they went, both of them, together,” would you

really wonder, “Wait, are they still together?”? I mean, there’s only one verse in between. So let’s put a flag in the text right there; this may be our first clue.

**ELEMENT A**

**ELEMENT B ELEMENT C**

**CENTER ELEMENT C**

**ELEMENT B**

**ELEMENT A**

If you read last week’s guide to Parshat Lech Lecha, the wheels in your head may already be starting to turn. Because whenever you find a strange repetition in the biblical text, it’s always a good idea to consider the possibility that it’s a *chiasm*. As we explained in the last guide, a chiasm is an A-B-A pattern, a pattern in which the first element mirrors the last element, the second element mirrors the second-to-last element, and so on. The pattern continues, building until its climax in the center. If you can identify and understand the center of a chiasm, then you’ll have the key to unlocking the meaning of the entire story.

Is that what’s happening here? Let’s keep exploring the text to see.

## More Clues?

So we found one repeating phrase – noteworthy, but that’s hardly a pattern. But if our theory is right, and this passage really is arrayed as a chiasm, then we should be able to find more clues. Remember that a chiasm builds outward from the center. So we should be able to look right *before* the first “and they went, both of them, together” and find a parallel right *after* the second “and they went, both of them, together.”

### LOOK INSIDE: Looking Before and After



In a chiasm, the corresponding elements aren’t always exactly the same, like they were with “and they went, both of them, together.” Sometimes you’ll find verses which describe a *similar concept* but with *different words*. Other times, you’ll find *mirror images,* two descriptions that seem like inverse echoes of one another. What’s key is that the two elements of the pair seem to be, somehow, in conversation with one another.

Take a look at the verses below. Do you see anything that looks like a parallel pair?

## *Before* the first “and they went…” *After* the second “and they went…”

**Genesis 22:6**

##### בראשית כב:ו

**Genesis 22:9**

##### בראשית כב:ט

**ו** ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ע ֵצי העֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם ַעל- ִי ְצ ָחק

**ט** ַו ָ ּיבאו, ֶאל-ה ָּמקום ֲא ׁ ֶשר ָא ַמר- ָלהֹואֱ לֹקים, ַו ִ ּי ֶבן ׁ ָשם

ֶאת-ה ֵא ׁש ְו ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת... ּב ָיד ֹו,

ּבנ ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח

א ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ַו ַ ּי ֲערֹ ְך ֶאת-ה ֵע ִצים; ַו ַ ּי ֲעקֹד, ֶאת- ִי ְצ ָחק

ְּבנ ֹו, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם אֹת ֹו ַעל-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ִמ ַּמ ַעל ָל ֵע ִצים.

**6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife...

**9** And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

At the end of verse 6, we’re told that Abraham takes wood and lays it on top of Isaac. Let’s think about this image. If you wanted to carry branches of wood on your back, what would you have to do to them? You’d have to tie them together into a bundle. That means that in verse 6, we have **tied-up wood on top of Isaac.**

Now take a look at verse 9: Abraham ties up Isaac and lays him on top of the wood that is on the altar. In other words, it’s **tied-up Isaac on top of wood.** Sounds like a mirror image to us!

## What’s In The Middle?

We’re starting to see the chiasm unfold before us, a once-invisible structure coming into focus:

**Genesis 22:6–9**

1. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering,

העֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם ַעל- ִי ְצ ָחק

##### בראשית כב:ו–ט

**ו** ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ע ֵצי

and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand

ּב ָיד ֹו, ֶאת-ה ֵא ׁש ְו ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת; וַ ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו

ְבּנ ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח

the fire and the knife; and they went, both of them,

ְש ֵני ֶהם, ַיחְ ָ ּדו. **ז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק ֶאל-א ְב ָר ָהם ָא ִביו,

together. **7** And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father,

ה ֵא ׁש

ה ֵּנה

ִני; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ב

ֶּנ ִּני ה

ו ּיֹא ֶמר ָא ִבי, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר,

and said: ‘My father.’ And he said: ‘Here am I, my son.’

**ח** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ַא ְב ָר ָהם,לעֹ ָלה.

הֶּ ׂשה,

ו ָה ֵע ִצים, ְו ַא ֵ ּיה

And he said: ‘Behold the fire and the wood; but where

ּב ִני; ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵניהֶם,

ָלה, לעֹ

הֶּ ׂשה

אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו

is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’ **8** And Abraham said: ‘God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering,

יחְ ָ ּדו. **ט** ַו ָ ּיבאו, ֶאל-ה ָּמקום ֲא ׁ ֶשר ָא ַמר- ָלהֹואֱ לֹקים,

ו ִ ּי ֶבן ׁ ָשם ַא ְב ָר ָהם ֶאת-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ַו ַ ּי ֲערֹ ְך ֶאת-ה ֵע ִצים;

my son.’ And they went, both of them, together. **9** And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

ּבנ ֹו, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם אֹת ֹו ַעל-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח,

ו ַ ּי ֲעקֹד, ֶאת- ִי ְצ ָחק

מִ ַמּ ַעל ָל ֵע ִצים.

This isn’t just a coincidence. Indeed, the pattern continues building outward; we encourage you to continue to trace it, or you can take our word for it. But we’re now in a position to ask the big question: What’s in the middle of this chiasm? After all, that’s the bullseye, the center of gravity around which the story revolves. Once we’ve identified the center, we’ll be able to take a step back and read the whole story in a new light.

It seems that the center is to be found in verses 7-8, in a conversation between Abraham and Isaac. Let’s take a closer look.

## The Conversation at the Center

### LOOK INSIDE: Closing in on the Center



Take a look at the verses below. Why do you think this conversation is at the center of our chiasm? What would you say is the *climax* of this conversation?

**Genesis 22:7–8**

1. And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said:

##### בראשית כב:ז–ח

**ז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק ֶאל-א ְב ָר ָהם ָא ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָא ִבי,

‘My father.’ And he said: ‘Here am I, my son.’ And he

ה ֵא ׁש ְו ָה ֵע ִצים, ְו ַא ֵ ּיה

ה ֵּנה

ִני; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ב

ֶּנ ִּני ה

ו ּיֹא ֶמר,

said: ‘Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’ **8** And Abraham said: ‘God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’...

ֹ**ח** ַאו ֶּימר, ַא ְב ָר ָהם, אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו

ִני... ּב

ְלעֹ ָלה.

ָלה, לעֹ

הֶּ ׂשה, הֶּ ׂשה

It turns out that this is the only conversation between Abraham and Isaac that is recorded in the entire Bible. What did they say to one another? Let’s first try to understand their dialogue, and then we can figure out why there’s a whole chiasm built around it.

Isaac asks his father:

**Genesis 22:7**

לעֹ ָלה

הֶּ ׂשה

ו ַא ֵ ּיה

Where is the lamb for the offering?

We want to point out that the language here is a little bit unusual. There are two words in Hebrew for “where,” and this

verse features ּיה ֵ אַ (“*ayeh*”), which is the less common of the two. The other word in Hebrew for “where” is אֵיפה (“*eifo*”).

Now, you might be asking: why do we need two words that mean the same thing? The answer is: We don’t. They have

*slightly* different meanings.

If you do an experiment and look for all of the instances of the word *eifo* in the Bible and compare it to the instances of *ayeh*, you’ll start to see a pattern, to detect some of the nuances between them. For starters, you’ll find that *eifo* is almost always a general request for location.

### PONDER THIS



So then what is ayeh? What else could “Where?” possibly mean?1

1 If you want to get even more of a feel for this, we invite you to take a look at some other instances of “*ayeh*” in the Bible. Start with Bereishit 3:9 and 4:9. (You’ll find the word word ּיה ֵ אַ with suffixes, so it

appears in a slightly different form each time, but the root is the same.)

Ayeh is not a logistical question. Isaac isn’t asking: “Hey Dad, where’s the lamb? Did we leave it by the woodshed, or is it at the house?” That’s an eifo question. Ayeh is an emotional question. It’s asking “Where?” about something that is missing, something whose absence is a cause for concern, for anguish even.



**PONDER THIS**

In light of that, look again at Isaac’s question:

**Genesis 22:7**

לעֹ ָלה

הֶּ ׂשה

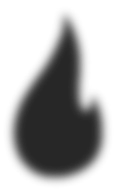
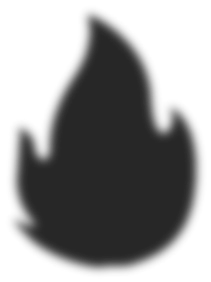
ו ַא ֵ ּיה

Where is the lamb for the offering?

What is Isaac really asking?

Isaac is asking: “Where did the lamb go? It was supposed to be here.” In other words, he’s asking: “Am I the lamb?” That’s a stark, painful question.

## Tricky Translation



And how does Abraham answer his son? Let’s look carefully at what happens next in this conversation.

### LOOK INSIDE



How do you understand Abraham’s reply?

**Genesis 22:8**

ּב ִני

ָלה לעֹ

הֶּ ׂשה

אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו

God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.

Now, can you think of a second way to translate it?

This sentence can be understood in one of two ways2, and it really hinges on how you translate “my son.” Here’s the most straightforward reading: Abraham is giving Isaac a piece of information (“God will provide Himself the lamb for the offering”) and then closes out the sentence by addressing him: “my son.” But with only a little bit of poetic license, you can read the sentence another way. What if “my son” is a part of the information? It suggests that “my son” *is* the offering.

2 Rashi points this out in his comment on the verse.

The meaning of verse 8 is unclear. Why is Abraham being so ambiguous?

**Here’s our take:** Maybe Abraham *doesn’t exactly know* what will happen at the top of the mountain. God had promised him that He would make him into a great nation – and now God is asking him to sacrifice his son, the very son who is to fulfill God’s promise. How can Abraham make sense of this? It’s a contradiction, a paradox. Abraham *can’t* make sense of it, and he doesn’t try. He tells himself: “God will figure out what is going to happen on the top

of the mountain. I don’t know what the offering is. Maybe it’s Isaac. I don’t know. That’s up to God. But there’s something that is up to me.” What’s up to Abraham?

## Whose Father?

In order to see it, let’s look back at the beginning of their conversation, before Isaac inquired about the lamb. How does the conversation begin?

**Genesis 22:7**

ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק ֶאל-א ְב ָר ָהם ָא ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָא ִבי.

And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: ‘My father.’

We think there are at least two strange things about this verse. The first is the word ִביו אָ, “his father.” We already know that Abraham is Isaac’s father. Why does the Bible feel the need to remind us, to emphasize this obvious fact?

The second thing that stands out to us is the repetition of the word ּיֹאמֶר ַו , “and he said.” It seems redundant! The verse says: “And Isaac *said* to Abraham his father, and he said.” Why the repetition?

### PONDER THIS



What do you make of these incongruities, the Torah’s emphasis on “his father” and the repetition of the word “and he said”?

**It sounds to us** as if Isaac opened his mouth to speak but he couldn’t get the words out. The only thing that he could manage to say was: ִבי אָ, “my father.” That’s all he says. Isaac can only manage a single word, but he might as well be screaming: “Father! You’re my father! I’m your son! You’re supposed to protect me. That’s your job.

What is happening here? Where are we going?” Isaac is reminding his father, and reminding us as readers, of the uncomfortable truth. Abraham isn’t just a knight of faith on a noble quest. He’s a father, and he seems to be leading his son to the slaughter.

## State of Denial



### PONDER THIS

As difficult as it is, put yourself in Abraham’s shoes at this moment. You have somehow managed to submit yourself to a divine command to sacrifice your child, a command that goes against everything that you believe to be right and just. What would be going on in your mind right now?

Here’s what you *wouldn’t* be thinking about. You wouldn’t be thinking about your relationship with your son. You wouldn’t be thinking about your obligations to him as a parent. You’d have to be in denial. You’d be telling yourself: God told me to do this and I’m just following His will.

But in this moment, when Isaac utters that one word – “my father” – he is shining the spotlight on their relationship. If you are Isaac’s father and you hear that word from your son, how do you want to respond? You want to evade it somehow, to avoid facing the painful truth. You want to shut down emotionally, to maintain your precious façade of denial. You want to talk about anything other than your relationship as parent and child.

### LOOK INSIDE



With that in mind, consider Abraham’s response:

**Genesis 22:7**

ב ִני

ה ֶּנ ִּני

Here I am, my son

What do you make of it?

What is Abraham’s response to Isaac? He responds: “Here I am, my son” - in Hebrew, *hineni. Hineni* is an expression of total openness to the other, of complete readiness to embrace one’s commitments. Let’s imagine the scene. Abraham and Isaac are stopped on the path. Abraham looks up and he meets his son’s gaze. The two of them lock eyes. Abraham could have turned away, but he doesn’t. He doesn’t change the topic. He doesn’t brush it off. He doesn’t run from the relationship. He affirms: “Yes, I am your father and you are my son. I am here for you.”

## The Bullseye

We’re now in a position to return to our outstanding question. We said that the center of the chiasm is to be found somewhere in this conversation. Where is it?

Well, there are five instances of ּיֹאמֶר ַו , “and he said,” in this exchange. Abraham’s response of *hineni* is right in the middle.

*This* is the center of gravity around which the *akeida* revolves.

Indeed, verse 8 is not the only time we hear Abraham say *hineni* in this story. There are two other instances. He says it at the very beginning of the *akeida*, when God first speaks to him in verse 1:

**Genesis 22:1**

ֶה ֵאה,ּל ְו ָהאֱ לֹקים, ִנ ָּסה ֶאת-א ְב ָר ָהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ֵא ָליו, ַא ְב ָר ָהם ַו ּיֹא ֶמר הִ ֵּנ ִני.

ה ְ ּד ָב ִרים

ו ְי ִהי, ַא ַחר

And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: ‘Abraham’; and he said: ‘Here am I.’

And he says it again, towards the end of the account, when the angel of God calls out to him upon the mountain in verse 11:

**Genesis 22:11**

ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֵא ָליו ַמ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, ִמן-ה ָּׁש ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ַא ְב ָר ָהם ַא ְב ָר ָהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, הִ ֵּנ ִני.

And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said: ‘Abraham, Abraham.’ And he said: ‘Here am I.’

### PONDER THIS



*Hineni* is at the start, the middle, and the end of the akeida. What do you make of that?

To us, it suggests that the same readiness and commitment that Abraham shows to God, he shows to Isaac.

You see, the *akeida* isn’t just about Abraham’s commitment to God. We all know that Abraham is loyal to God, that he passed God’s test. That is explicit in the verses. But the *akeida* is also about Abraham’s commitment to Isaac, about Abraham’s loyalty to his own moral compass. That quiet moment shared between a father and son, that moment when the father could have run away from their relationship but didn’t: that’s the bullseye. That was another test, a test of Abraham’s devotion to his son, and he passed. That’s what the Bible wants us to read between the lines and see.

Abraham maintained his loyalty to God and to Isaac, even when his two worlds collided, even when it ceased to make any sense. “At the top of the mountain, God will have to figure it all out,” he must have told himself. “All I know is that I’m here for God, and I’m here for my son.” He stood unwavering in his commitments to God and to man. That was his greatness.



Vayeira: Abraham’s Struggle With Loyalty

Source Sheet | Page 1

**Genesis 22:1–19**

**בראשית כב:א–יט**

1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did

ְב ָר ָהם; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר את-א

ֶה ֵאה,ּל ְו ָהאֱ לֹקים, ִנ ָּסה

**א** ַו ְי ִהי, א ַחר ה ְ ּד ָב ִרים

prove Abraham, and said unto him: ‘Abraham’; and he said:

**ב** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ַקח-נא את- ִב ְנָך את- ְי ִחי ְדָךה ֵּנ ִני.

א ָליו, א ְב ָר ָהם ַו ּיֹא ֶמר

‘Here am I.’ **2** And He said: ‘Take now thy son, thine only

אל-א ֶרץ ה ּמֹ ִר ָ ּיה; ְו ַה ֲע ֵלהו ׁ ָשם,

א ׁ ֶשר-א ַה ְב ָּת, את- ִי ְצ ָחק, ְו ֶל ְך- ְלָך,

son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the

land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering

לעֹ ָלה, על א ַחד ה ָה ִרים, א ׁ ֶשר אֹ ַמר א ֶליָך. **ג** ַו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ֵּכם א ְב ָר ָהם ּב ּ ֹב ֶקר,

upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.’ **3** And

את-חמֹר ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח את- ׁש ֵני ְנ ָע ָריו א ּת ֹו, ְו ֵאת ִי ְצ ָחק ּבנ ֹו; ַו ְי ַב ַּקע,

ו ַ ּי ֲחב ׁש

Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass,

אל-ה ָּמקום א ׁ ֶשר-א ַמר- ָלהֹואֱ לֹקים. **ד** ב ּי ֹום

ע ֵצי עֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ָקם ַו ֵ ּי ֶל ְך,

and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his

ָּמקום--מ ָרחֹק. **ה** את-ה

את-עי ָניו ַו ַ ּי ְרא

ְב ָר ָהם א

ה ְּׁש ִלי ׁ ִשי, ַו ִ ּיָּ ׂשא

son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and

אל-נ ָע ָריו, ׁ ְשב ּו- ָל ֶכם ֹפה עם-ה ֲחמ ֹור, ַו ֲא ִני ְו ַה ַּנ ַער,

ְב ָר ָהם א

ו ּיֹא ֶמר

rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. **4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. **5** And Abraham said unto his young men: ‘Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come back to you.’ **6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it

נ ְל ָכה עד- ּכה; ְו ִנ ׁ ְש ַּת ֲח ֶוה, ְו ָנ ׁש ּו ָבה א ֵלי ֶכם. **ו** ַו ִ ּי ַּקח א ְב ָר ָהם את-ע ֵצי

העֹ ָלה, ַו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם על- ִי ְצ ָחק ּבנ ֹו, ַו ִ ּי ַּקח ּב ָיד ֹו, את-ה ֵא ׁש ְו ֶאת-ה ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת;

ו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵני ֶהם, ַי ְח ָ ּדו. **ז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ִי ְצ ָחק אל-א ְב ָר ָהם א ִביו, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר א ִבי,

ו ּיֹא ֶמר, ה ֶּנ ִּני ב ִני; ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ה ֵּנה ה ֵא ׁש ְו ָה ֵע ִצים, ְו ַא ֵ ּיה הֶּ ׂשה, לעֹ ָלה. **ח**

או ֶּימר, א ְב ָר ָהם, אֱ לֹקים ִי ְר ֶאה- ּל ֹו הֶּ ׂשה לעֹ ָלה, ּב ִני; ַו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ׁ ְש ֵני ֶהם,

upon Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the

א ׁ ֶשר א ַמר- ָלהֹואֱ לֹקים, ַו ִ ּי ֶבן ׁ ָשם

יחְ ָ ּדו. **ט** ַו ָ ּיבאו, אל-ה ָּמקום

knife; and they went, both of them, together. **7** And Isaac

את-ה ֵע ִצים; ַו ַ ּי ֲעקֹד, את- ִי ְצ ָחק ּבנ ֹו,

א ְב ָר ָהם את-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, ַו ַ ּי ֲערֹ ְך

spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: ‘My father.’ And

ָיד ֹו, את-

ְב ָר ָהם א

ו ָ ּי ֶ ׂשם אֹת ֹו על-ה ִּמ ְז ֵּב ַח, מ ַּמ ַעל ל ֵע ִצים. **י** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַלח

he said: ‘Here am I, my son.’ And he said: ‘Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?’ **8** And Abraham said: ‘God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.’ And they went, both of them, together. **9** And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. **10** And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

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ְבנ ֹו. את-

ל ׁ ְשחֹט,

ַּמ ֲא ֶכ ֶלת, את-ה

ו ִ ּי ַּקח

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Vayeira: Abraham’s Struggle With Loyalty

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**11** And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of

ְב ָר ָהם; א

ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, א ְב ָר ָהם מן-ה ָּׁש

**יא** ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא א ָליו מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה,

heaven, and said: ‘Abraham, Abraham.’ And he said: ‘Here am I.’ **12** And he said: ‘Lay not thy hand upon the lad,

ו ּיֹאמֶר, ה ֵּנ ִני. **יב** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, אל- ּת ׁ ְש ַלח ָי ְדָך אל-ה ַּנ ַער, ְו ַאל- ּת ַעש ל ֹו, מאו ָמה: ּכי ע ָּתה ָי ַ ִד ְיע, ּ ִּתכי- ְי ֵרא אֱ לֹקים א ָּתה, ְולֹא ח ַ ׂש ְכ ָּת את- ִב ְנָך

neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man, seeing thou hast not withheld

א ְב ָר ָהם את-עי ָניו, ַו ַ ּי ְרא ְו ִה ֵּנה-א ִיל, א ַחר, א ְב ָר ָהם ַו ִ ּי ַּקח את-ה ַא ִיל, ַו ַ ּי ֲע ֵלהו לעֹ ָלה

ְך מ ֶּמ ִּני. **יג** ַו ִ ּיָּ ׂשא ּב ַק ְר ָניו; ַו ֵ ּי ֶל

את- ְי ִחי ְדָך,

נאֱ חז ּב ְּס ַב ְך

thy son, thine only son, from Me.’ **13** And Abraham lifted

ההוא, ְיקוה ִי ְר ֶאה, א ׁ ֶשר

ּבנ ֹו. **יד** ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא א ְב ָר ָהם ׁ ֵשם-ה ָּמקום

ַתחַת

up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and

took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the

י ָא ֵמר ה ּי ֹום, ּב ַהר ְיקוה ֵי ָר ֶאה. **טו** ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, אל-א ְב ָר ָהם, ֵש ִנית, מִן- ַה ָּׁשמָ ִים. **טז** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר, ּבי ִנ ׁ ְש ַּב ְע ִּתי ְנ ֻאם- ְיקוה: ּכי, ַי ַען א ׁ ֶשר

stead of his son. **14** And Abraham called the name of that

ִב ְנָך את- ְי ִחי ֶדָך. **יז** ּכי-ב ֵר ְך את-

ה ֶ ּזה, ְולֹא ח ַ ׂש ְכ ָּת,

ע ִ ׂשי ָת את-ה ָ ּד ָבר

place Adonai-jireh; as it is said to this day: ‘In the mount where the LORD is seen.’ **15** And the angel of the LORD

ֹו ֵיי א ָב ֶר ְכָך, ְו ַה ְר ָּבה א ְר ֶּבה את-ז ְר ֲעָך ּככ ֹו ְכ ֵבי ה ָּׁש ַמ ִים, ְו ַכחול, א ׁ ֶשר על- ׂש ַפת ה ָ ּים; ְו ִי ַר ׁש ַז ְר ֲעָך, את ׁ ַש ַער אֹ ְי ָביו. **יח** ְו ִה ְת ָּב ְרכ ּו ב ַז ְר ֲעָך, ֹכל ג

called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, **16** and

ע ֶקב, א ׁ ֶשר ׁ ָש ַמ ְע ָּת ּבקֹ ִלי. **יט** ַו ָ ּי ׁ ָשב א ְב ָר ָהם אל-נ ָע ָריו, ַו ָ ּי ֻקמ ּו

ה ָא ֶרץ,

said: ‘By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, **17** that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the

heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; **18** and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

because thou hast hearkened to My voice.’ **19** So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

אל- ְב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע; ַו ֵ ּי ׁ ֶשב א ְב ָר ָהם, ּב ְב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע.

ו ֵ ּי ְלכ ּו ַי ְח ָ ּדו

[www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org/) ALEPH BETA STUDY GUIDE ON PARSHAT VAYEIRA - PAGE 11

Hi everybody, this is Rabbi David Fohrman and welcome to Parshat Vayeira.

Last week I introduced you to these Atbash patterns which I think are very fascinating and today I want to show you one of them in Parshat Vayeira that I think has very dramatic consequences - consequences for understanding a very, very difficult story: the story of the Binding of Isaac, the akeidah.

When normally we think of the Binding of Isaac, we think of that as a kind of test of faith. I want to argue that it's more than that. It's not just the story of how faithful Avraham is to God. It's about something else too; the Atbash pattern suggests exactly what that is.

# Understanding the Binding of Isaac

Come with me to Bereishit chaf-bet, chapter 22. The easiest way to see the pattern, begin to pick it up, is to look at the end of verse 6. 'Vayelchu shneihem yachdav,' Avraham and Yitzhak, walking together up to the mountain.

It turns out that that phrase, 'vayelchu shneihem yachdav,' appears another time just a couple of verses later, in verse 8, 'vayelchu shneihem yachdav.' Avraham and Isaac walk together.

Okay, interesting. Is there anything else about this story that has that sort of mirror-image quality? Let's look right before the first 'vayelchu shneihem yachdav' and see if we find anything there that mirrors something that comes right after the second 'vayelchu shneihem yachdav.' That's what you would look for in an Atbash pattern.

Look at the beginning of verse 6: 'Vayikach Avraham et-atzei ha-olah vayasem al-Yitzhak bno.' Avraham took the wood for the offering and put it on top of Yitzhak. Now, just a very practical question, if you were carrying branches on your back, what would have to be done to the branches in order for you to be able to transport them on your back? You have to rope them all together. Yitzhak is carrying roped-up wood on his back up the mountain. Roped-up wood on top of Yitzhak.

Now look at the bottom of the story. So Avraham builds an altar 'v'ya'aroch et ha etzim' and he arranges the wood, 'v'ya'akod et Yitzhak bno' and he ties up Yitzhak, 'vayasem otoh al-ha-mizbeach mi-maal l'etzim' and he puts him on top of the wood. Fascinating -- tied-up Yitzhak on top of wood, mirroring tied-up wood on top of Isaac. What we are seeing is like the beginning of this chiasm, ABBA, leading you to ask, well, what's in the middle?

What happens in the middle is a conversation -- a conversation between Yitzhak and Avraham. It’s a conversation which you might think is kind of trivial, until you realize it's the only conversation we know of in the entire Torah between Avraham and Yitzhak. It must be a pretty important conversation. This conversation is the center of the chiasm. Do you know what that means? The implications are that the center of gravity around which this whole story revolves, is this conversation. Something happens here that this story is all about. What happens here?

# The

Story of

# Abraham and Isaac

Verse 7: 'Vayomer Yitzhak el-Avraham aviv, vayomer avi.' If you listen carefully to these words, you will find a redundancy. Listen to them one more time: And Yitzhak said to Avraham his father, and he said, my father. Did you hear that? There is an extra 'And he said.' Why do you need the second 'And he said'? Also, why does the text have to tell you that Avraham is his father?

So my Rosh Yeshiva, Yaakov Weinberg—z"l—says there are two different conversations here, it's just that the first one got interrupted. 'Vayomer Yitzhak el Avraham aviv'…and Yitzhak said to Avraham, his father…and then you're waiting to hear what it is that he said, but then Yitzhak stopped and he said something else. And the something else that he said was 'My father.'

Now, if you are Avraham and you hear those words, what would you want to do? 'My father.' Those are the two words that you just don't want to hear right now…because what are you going up to the mountain to do? You are going up to the mountain because God told you you have to give back your son, you have to kill your son and offer him up to God at the top of the mountain! It's inconceivable, but this is what God said that He wants. What's the one obligation that a father has towards his son? The one obligation is protection, and here you are, going to kill your son!? So if you are Abraham, how do you do this? You try to avoid thinking about it, you think about anything you can think about, you want to distract, you are talking about the weather, you are talking about this, you are talking about that, but the one thing you don't want to think about is the father-son relationship. But the Torah goes out of its way to tell you it's there.

'Vayomer Yitzhak el-Avraham aviv' reminds us who Avraham is. Avraham is his father, and Yitzhak said to Avraham, his father, and he said one word: 'My father.' And if you are Yitzhak's father and you hear those words from your son, what do you want to do now? You want to run away, run down the mountain; you want to have nothing to do with this, forget it, I am out of here! And if you don't run away physically, you run away emotionally. You want to talk about anything than what Yitzhak wants to talk about. What is going to happen in this conversation? This is the conversation where Yitzhak finds out the truth. What's the question that comes next?

'Vayomer, hinei ha-esh v'ha-etzim.' Yitzhak says, here is the wood, here is the fire—'v'ayeh ha-seh l- olah'—where is the lamb for the offering? What do you mean, where is the lamb for the offering? In Hebrew there are two words for 'Where?' One is 'eifo'; the other is 'ayeh.' Eifo is always just a general request for location.

'Ayeh' is never a request for location. 'Ayeh' never means 'where are you'; it means 'where have you gone, why aren't you here?' 'Ayeh ha-seh l-olah' doesn't mean, 'dad, where is the lamb for the offering, did we leave it by the woodshed or is it over there by the house?' No, it means 'where did the lamb go?' That's a different question entirely. That question is, 'Am I the lamb?' This is the conversation where Isaac finds out - and this, I believe, is exactly what Rashi means to tell us when Rashi talks about the two 'vayelchu shneihem yachdav's. Rashi says, the same way that they walked together before this

conversation, they walked together after this conversation. Because if you think about it, what could introduce the greatest dissonance in the relationship between father and son?

# Why

Does

# Abraham Bind and Offer His

Son

# Isaac?

I had a dream last night and God came to me and said I am supposed to kill you. That would be the greatest problem that you could possibly imagine in a relationship, right? I mean this is what Avraham and Yitzhak have to contend with. But, the same unity of mind and heart which united father and son before this conversation exists after this conversation as well, and that's the greatness of Avraham and Yitzhak here.

Now look carefully at what happens in this conversation. How does Avraham answer his son? 'Vayomer Avraham,' and Avraham says, 'Elohim yireh-lo ha-seh l-olah bni.' God will show for Himself a lamb for the offering my son. And the question is, what exactly does that mean? It actually depends on where you put the comma - and Rashi points this out as well. The phrase could be understood in one of two ways: Either it could mean, ‘God will show for Himself a lamb for the offering, comma, my son.’ But what if you put no comma in? ‘God will show for Himself a lamb for the offering my son.’ Then maybe my son is the offering, maybe my son is the lamb. Why is Avraham being ambiguous?

Maybe the answer is: Avraham doesn't know what's going to be at the top of this mountain. It doesn't make any sense. God promised that there would be a great nation coming through you, but he is also telling me to come and I am supposed to offer up my son at the top of the mountain? None of this makes any sense. What's going to happen at the top of the mountain? I don't know. But I know one thing, I know that God has a job and I have a job. God is going to figure out what is going to happen on top of the mountain. I don't know what the lamb is. Maybe the lamb is you - that’s up to God. But there’s something that’s up to me... what’s up to me?

What's up to me happens right in the middle of this conversation. There are five 'vayomer's in this conversation. This conversation is the center of the Akeidah, and if there are five 'vayomer's, there's a middle one. The middle 'vayomer' - 'and he said,' is what Avraham said to Yitzhak, after Yitzhak said, 'My father.' What did Avraham say? 'Vayomer hineini bni'... 'here I am, my son.' That's the center of the Akedah. Right when I want to run away most, I am here for you. Ask your question. I know who you are - you are my son and I am your father. Now, ask your question.

# The Meaning of Abraham and Isaac's Story

Avraham's greatness was that he didn't run away, not physically and not emotionally. What's going to

happen on the top of the mountain? I have no idea. I am your father and I am here for you. Isn't it

fascinating that the Akedah begins with 'hineini'? 'Hineini' to God. God calls out and says, 'Avraham, Avraham' and Avraham answers 'hineini'... 'here I am.' And at the end of the story, the angel calls out and Avraham answers 'hineini.' It's one thing to say 'here I am' to God and 'here I am' to the angel. It's another thing to say 'here I am' to Yitzhak.

Avraham's greatness is that he balances all of this. You see, I could turn off to Yitzhak and say, I have nothing to do with him, my allegiance is to God. Or I could just say, God, I have nothing to do with You, this is crazy, my allegiance is to Yitzhak. Avraham's greatness is, he is going to be here for both of them. It's a contradiction, it makes no sense, it doesn't matter. I have allegiance towards both. At the top of the mountain God's going to have to figure it out. Until then, I am here, not just for God, I am here for my son too -- and that's the greatness of Avraham. Avraham has fealty to every important relationship, even when these two worlds collide. It doesn't make any sense, that's God's problem, He will have to figure it out. I am here for both.



**PARSHAT VAYEIRA: ABRAM, SARAI, HAGAR, ISHMAEL**…**AND EGYPT?**

This guide corresponds to the video: [Vayeira: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/abraham-outcasts-hagar-story)

**SABBATH TABLE OUTLINE**



1. This week we will deal with a painful and difficult story that began last week and continues this week: Abraham and Sarah and interaction with Hagar and

Ishmael

* 1. Last week's parsha: Hagar (Egyptian maidservant) is mother of Abraham's first child
  2. While Hagar is pregnant, Sarah oppressed her, and she ran away from her
  3. In this week's parsha, Hagar is sent away from the family
  4. Commentaries agree that it is a difficult and painful story (Nachmanides calls out their treatment of Hagar, calling it a sin)

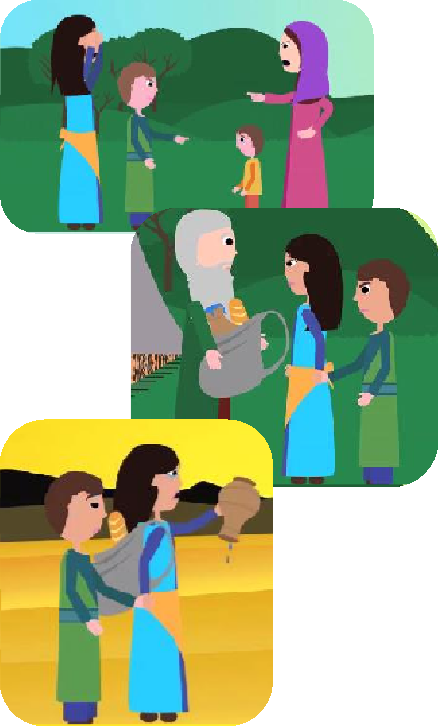
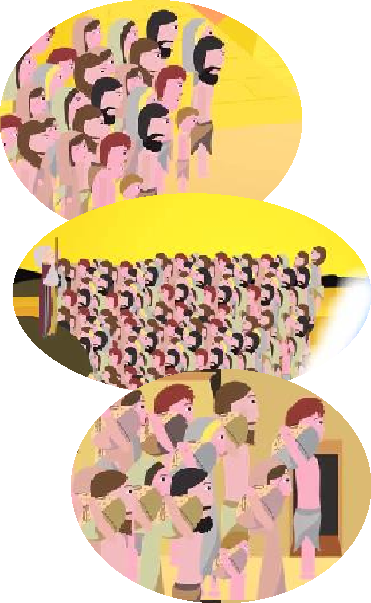
Guide by Dr. Sarah Levy

1. Why does the Bible focus on these sins?
   1. One answer goes back to the Torah being a guidebook
   2. The Torah highlights the sins of our ancestors to let us know what to be careful of
      1. Possible that Sarah's sin was more subtle
      2. Audio epilogue: story behind a story of what's going on in Sarah's head
2. Journey through words to show epic story
   1. Start with last week's parsha, introductory verse in Genesis 16:1
      1. Why does the Torah purposely tell us about Hagar’s Egyptian nationality?
         1. Context: story takes place right after prophetic moment when Abraham I was first told that he would have biological child, but something else happens too - Abraham finds out that his family will be enslaved
         2. Torah doesn’t say *where* Abraham's descendants will be enslaved
      2. The very next chapter, we meet a woman who is a servant in Abraham's house who is Egyptian
         1. Verb that she experiences is *ennui*, the very same verb that God says Abraham's children will experience
         2. We knows whose household it ends up being
         3. Isn't it interesting that the Torah gives us her nationality - Egyptian?

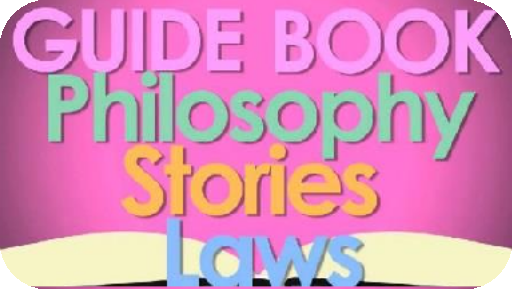
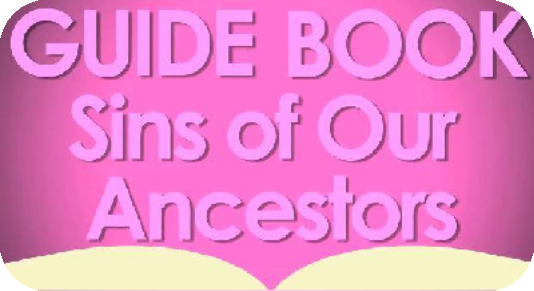


Now let's talk about her name

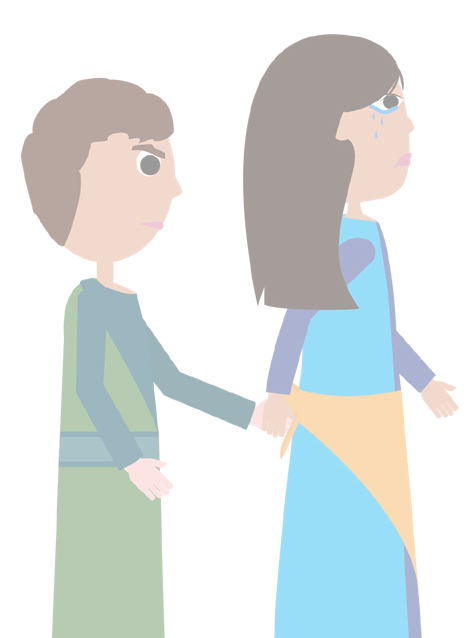
b)

1. .ר.ג.ה is stranger
2. God tells Abraham that his descendants will be strangers in a land
3. She suffered oppression, and so will Abraham's children
4. In this chapter, we are beginning to get the hints of a gathering storm - slavery doesn't come out of nowhere, and this is one of the seeds that leads to that situation
5. Is there any more evidence?
   1. Yes - in this week's parsha, story expulsion of Ishmael and Hagar
      1. Ishamel was taunting Isaac, rivalry spilling into next generation
      2. Sarah decides it must stop, and Hagar must leave
      3. Abraham wakes in the morning and gives Hagar bread and water (Genesis 21:14)
      4. She goes, and she gets lost in the desert
      5. She puts Ishmael down and cries, expecting child to die
      6. Angel comes and tells her not to worry, child will become a great nation
      7. She opens her eyes, sees a well, and drinks
      8. Her journey through the desert continues
   2. What does this story remind you of?
      1. Leaves servitude and enters desert - when we leave Egypt (Hagar's homeland), we enter desert (מדבר is used in both stories)
      2. Loses way - after the nation of Israel leaves Israel, the people are confused and swallowed by desert (Exodus 14:3)
      3. Experiences a water crisis - as the nation of Israel wander the desert, they experience two water crises (Red Sea, cannot find water)
      4. Divine intervention protected Hagar, divine intervention protected us (sea splits, experience divine intervention from thirst when Moses throws a branch to sweeten water)
      5. When angel interceded to protect Hagar, he says not to fear (Genesis 21:17) which are the same words as used before the sea split for Israel (Exodus 14:13)
      6. As Abraham sends out Hagar, he gives her bread and places it on her shoulders just like when the people left Egypt - it's how we took matzah with us (Exodus 12:34)
   3. This book gives us seeds that come into scary fruition in Exodus



1. Torah is a guidebook; it doesn't just highlight the mistakes of our ancestors for no reason
   1. We are meant to learn things from these stories
   2. What do we learn here?
      1. As we leave Egypt, we are told to love the stranger and not wrong the stranger because you know what it is like to be a stranger
      2. The Torah wants us to walk out of Egypt with sensitivity towards people who feel like a stranger
      3. Exodus from Egypt is a birth of a nation for people like us, but what about them?
   3. We still have strangers in our lives today:
      1. How do we welcome converts?
      2. How do we treat the good moral people who live among us?
      3. How do we treat our housekeeper? People on the street?
   4. It's not just loving our neighbors; it's also loving the stranger





**VAYEIRA: ABRAM, SARAI, HAGAR, ISHMAEL AND...EXODUS?**

This guide corresponds to the video: [Vayeira: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/story-of-abraham-binding-isaac)

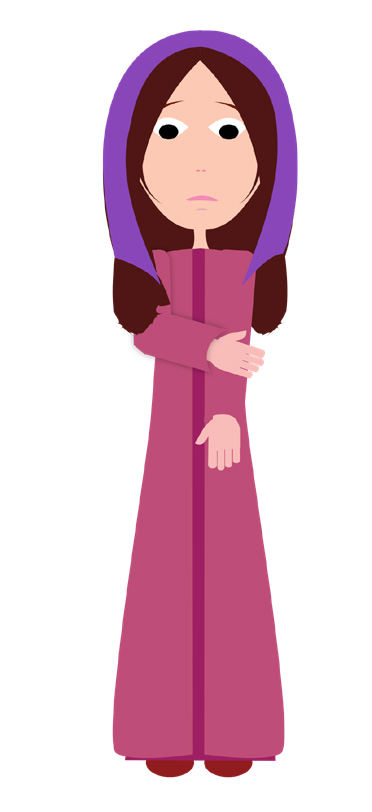
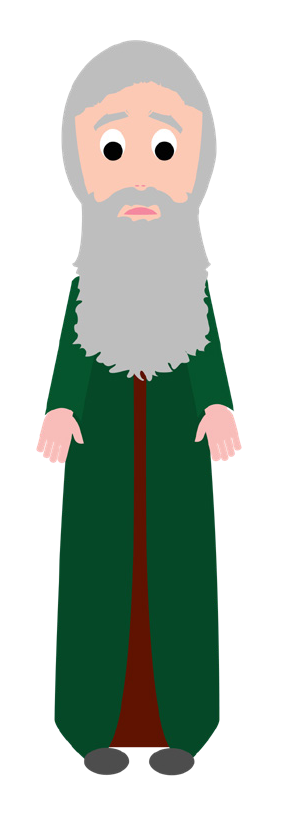
Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Vayeira!

**Learning From Our Forebears**

We want to tackle a difficult and painful story: the saga of Abraham, Sarah1, and their maidservant Hagar. In *Parshat Lech Lecha*, the Torah told us that Sarah oppressed Hagar, that she dealt harshly with her.2 And it doesn’t get much better in *Parshat Vayeira*: Sarah wants Hagar thrown out of the house, expelled from the family - and Abraham dutifully obeys.

Hagar and her son Ishmael are cast out of Abraham’s home and they wander in the desert, narrowly escaping death by thirst.3

These stories do not paint our forebears - Abraham and Sarah - in the rosiest of lights. Indeed, the medieval commentator Nachmanides takes them to task for their treatment of Hagar, calling it a sin.4 The question you have to ask is: why is this something the Torah chooses to tell us about? What is the Torah trying to teach us by focusing on this story?



We may be used to seeing our biblical patriarchs and matriarchs as paragons of virtue - and in many ways, that is absolutely true. But we want to raise the possibility that those same patriarchs and matriarchs made mistakes, and that the Torah shares their stories with us so that we can learn from their errors.5 Indeed, in telling the

story of Hagar, the Torah is warning us about something that we - as a nation - need to be especially careful about. For while this story seems like an isolated tale, it has ripple effects throughout the Torah. Let’s take a look at the verses and we’ll see it for ourselves.

## A Curious Connection

The story begins in Genesis Chapter 16, where we are first introduced to Hagar:

**Genesis 16:1-2**

ָצ ַר ִני ְיקוה ִמ ֶּל ֶדת-- ּבא-נא ֶאל- ׁש ְפ ָח ִתי, או ַלי ִא ָּב ֶנה ה ֵּנה-נא ֲע

ׂש ַרי ֶאל-א ְב ָרם,

ָגר. ַו ּתֹא ֶמר ה

ו ָ ׂש ַרי ֵא ׁ ֶשת ַא ְב ָרם, לֹא ָי ְל ָדה ל ֹו; ְו ָל ּה ׁ ִש ְפ ָחה ִמ ְצ ִרית, ּו ׁ ְש ָמ ּה

ׂש ָרי.

לקול

מ ֶּמ ָּנה; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע ַא ְב ָרם,

Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, “Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her.” And Abram heeded Sarai’s request.

1 We use the names “Abraham” and “Sarah” throughout this guide, although they are not technically given those names until Genesis 17.

2 Genesis 16

3 Genesis 21

4 See Nachmanides (Ramban) to Genesis 16:6

5 That being said, perhaps this “sin” of Abraham and Sarah is more subtle than it appears. Rabbi Fohrman explores this possibility in his audio epilogue to the video, “*Vayeira:* Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?”, available at [www.alephbeta.org.](http://www.alephbeta.org/)

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of

Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Vayeira: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

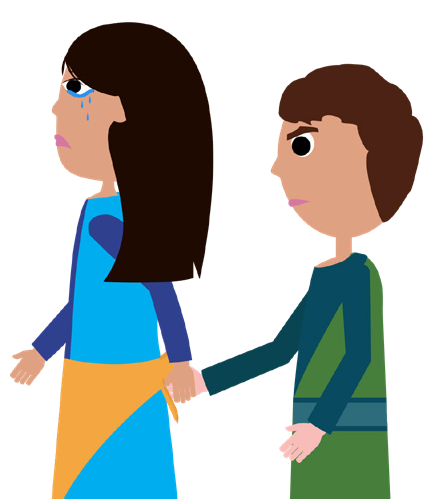
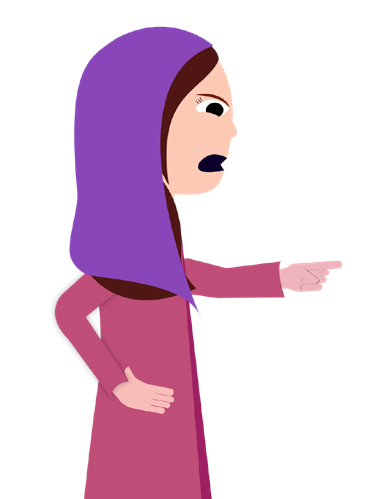
Despairing at her own barrenness and eager to see her husband have a child, Sarah instructs Abraham to marry her maidservant Hagar and have a child with her. But no sooner than Hagar conceives does she begin to disdain her ostensible mistress. Sarah is infuriated by Hagar’s disrespect. She complains to Abraham and he tells her, “Deal with her as you think right.” So what does Sarah do?

**Genesis 16:6**

ׂשרַי, ַו ִּת ְברַח ִמ ָּפ ֶני ָה

##### ו ְּתעַ ֶּנ ָה

And Sarai **oppressed** her, and [Hagar] ran away from her



Note that first word - ָה ֶּנ ְּתעַ ַו (“she oppressed her”). This isn’t the first time we heard about “oppression “ in the Torah. Indeed, if you go back only a dozen verses, we heard about another “oppression.” It was part of the *Brit Bein haBetarim*, the Covenant of the Parts: a prophecy in which God appeared to Abraham and revealed something shocking:

**Genesis 16:6**

ּב ֶא ֶרץ לֹא ָל ֶהם, ַו ֲע ָבד ּום, **ְועִ ּנ ּו** אֹ ָתם--א ְר ַּבע ֵמאות, ׁ ָש ָנה.

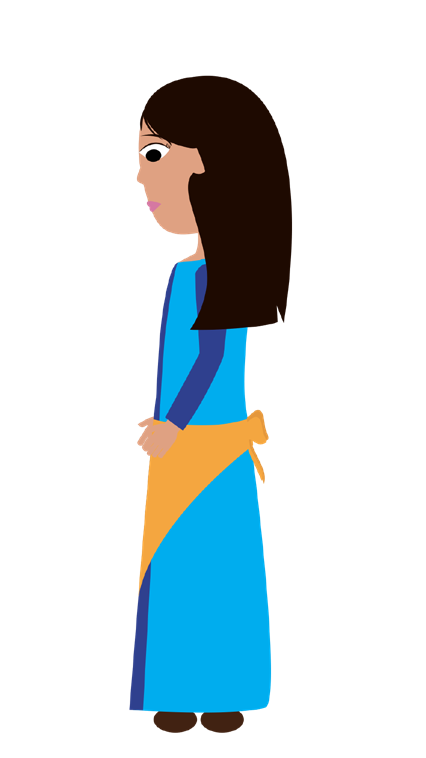
ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך ּכי-גר

ָרם, ָידֹ ַע ֵּת ַדע ל ַא ְב

ו ּיֹא ֶמר

And [God] said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and **oppressed** four hundred years…

Look at that - the same word, only a few verses apart. By using the same word in these two places, it seems like the Torah is trying to draw a connection between the oppression that Hagar experiences and the



oppression that Abraham’s descendants will experience… the oppression of Egyptian servitude.6

Well, isn’t that interesting? God ordains that Abraham’s descendants will toil in Egyptian servitude… and in the very next chapter, we meet an *Egyptian* woman who experiences servitude in Abraham’s house. Two instances of עינוי, oppression: first Abraham’s descendants and now Hagar.

Speaking of which, let’s talk about Hagar’s name. What else does *hey-gimmel-res*h (הגר) spell? It spells ֵּגר הַ (*ha-ger*) - “the stranger.” Does that word ring any bells for you?

**Genesis 15:3**

ֶרץ לֹא ָל ֶהם ּב ֶא

**גֵר** ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך

Your offspring shall be **strangers** in a land not theirs

That was the first part of the prophecy in the *Brit Bein haBetarim*: Abraham’s descendants would be “strangers” in a foreign land, the land of their ultimate oppression - the land of Egypt.

It’s hard to ignore the implications: Hagar felt herself to be a stranger in Abraham’s house. She endured oppression. Now, Abraham’s children would be strangers in Hagar’s “household” - in Egypt. They too would know what it feels like to be oppressed. It seems that right here in Chapter 16 in the Book of Genesis, we’re beginning to get the hints of a gathering storm. Egyptian slavery doesn’t come out of nowhere. There are seeds. This tale with Hagar, the way that Abraham and Sarah treat her: it seems to be one of those seeds.

## Hagar’s Exodus

But wait: are we getting ahead of ourselves? Is there any more evidence that supports this connection between the treatment of Hagar and the Israelites’ experience in Egypt?

As a matter of fact, there is. As you continue to read Hagar’s tale, you find that it is riddled with clues. Consider the tale of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis Chapter 21. Let’s review the verses, and as we do, ask yourself: “What does this story remind you of?”

**Genesis 21:9-10**

ּזֹאת, ִעם- ְב ִני ה

ָא ָמה ּבן-ה

לֹא ִיי ַר ׁש ּכי

ּזֹאת, ְו ֶאת- ְב ָנ ּה: ה

ָא ָמה ה

ְב ָר ָהם, ָּג ֵר ׁש ל ַא

ָר ָהם--מ ַצ ֵחק. ַו ּתֹא ֶמר, ל ַא ְב

ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית, ֲא ׁ ֶשר- ָי ְל ָדה

ׂש ָרה ֶאת- ֶבן-ה ָגר

ו ֵּת ֶרא

ִעם- ִי ְצ ָחק.

Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham making sport. She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

6 Granted, God doesn’t explicitly mention Egypt in the *Brit bein haBetarim*, but if you’ve read the rest of the Torah, you know that that’s how the story ultimately plays out.

Sarah finally gives birth to her own biological child, Isaac - and when he finds Ishmael taunting him, she decides that Ishmael - and Hagar - must go. God concurs, and Abraham wakes up early to send them from the house:

**Genesis 2114-17**

ְּב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע. ַו ִ ּי ְכל ּו ה ַּמ ִים, ִמן-

ְד ַּבר ּב ִמ

ּב ּ ֹב ֶקר ַו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ְו ֵח ַמת ַמ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן ֶאל-ה ָגר ׂשם ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה, ְו ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד--ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּל ֶח ָה; ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ַתע,

ו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ֵּכם ַא ְב ָר ָהם

ה ָ ּי ֶלד; ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ִמ ֶּנ ֶגד, ַו ִּת ָּ ׂשא ֶאת-

ה ִּ ׂשי ִחם. ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ָל ּה ִמ ֶּנ ֶגד, ה ְר ֵחק ּכ ְמ ַט ֲח ֵוי ֶק ׁ ֶשת, ּכי ָא ְמ ָרה, ַאל-א ְר ֶאה ּבמ ֹות

ה ֵח ֶמת; ַו ַּת ׁ ְש ֵל ְך ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד, ַּת ַחת ַא ַחד

ַמע ֱאלֹקים ֶאל-קול ה ַּנ ַער ּכי- ׁש

ָגר; ַאל- ּתי ְר ִאי, ה

קֹ ָל ּה ַו ֵּת ְב ְּך. ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע ֱאלֹקים, ֶאת-קול ה ַּנ ַער, ַו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ַמ ְל ַא ְך ֱאלֹקים ֶאל-ה ָגר ִמן-ה ׁ ָּש ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ָל ּה ַמה- ָּל ְך

ַּב ֲא ׁ ֶשר הוא- ׁשם.

Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them on her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears. God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar?

Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is.”



What does this story remind you of?

Hagar left servitude and entered a forbidden wilderness, a *midbar.* Who else left servitude and entered a *midbar*? That’s what *we* did, as a nation, when we left Egypt - Hagar’s homeland - after all those centuries of slavery. What happened to Hagar when she left? She lost her way; she was just wandering around the desert. What happened to the Israelites when they left Egypt?

**Exodus 14:3**

ה ִּמ ְד ָּבר.

ַגר ֲע ֵלי ֶהם, ס

ָא ֶרץ; ּב

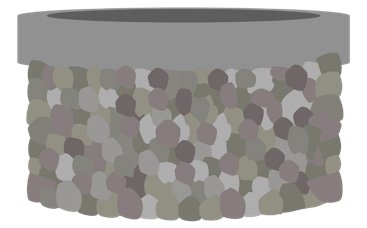
ל ְב ֵני ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל, ְנ ֻב ִכים הם

ו ָא ַמר ַּפ ְרעֹה

Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.”

*We* also got lost in the desert.

What happened next to Hagar? She experienced a water crisis. Her water canteen ran out. She expected that she and her child would die of thirst. But an angel interceded for Hagar and Ishmael, and God pointed the way to a well where they could drink.7 Did anything like that happen to the children



of Israel? It surely did; they too experienced a water crisis. After crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites went three days without any water. But just as Ishmael and Hagar experienced a miraculous relief from their thirst, so too did the Israelites. God instructed Moses to cast a branch into a bitter oasis and the waters became sweet, allowing the people to drink.8

And, back when the angel had interceded for Hagar, he told her:

7 Genesis 21:17-19

8 Exodus 15:22-25

**Genesis 21:17**

אַל- ִּתי ְראִי

Do not fear!

What does Moses tell the people on their way out of Egypt, right before the splitting of the Red Sea?

**Exodus 14:13**

ַאל- ּתי ָראו

Do not fear!

And if you’re still not persuaded that there are bona fide connections here, think back to that moment when Abraham first sent Hagar out of the house:

**Genesis 21:14**

##### ׂשם ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה

ו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ְו ֵח ַמת ַמ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן ֶאל-ה ָגר

And [Abraham] took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them **on her shoulder**

When else do we have someone leaving a place with bread on their shoulders?

**Exodus 12:33-34**

ּב ִ ׂש ְמלֹ ָתם, **ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמם.**

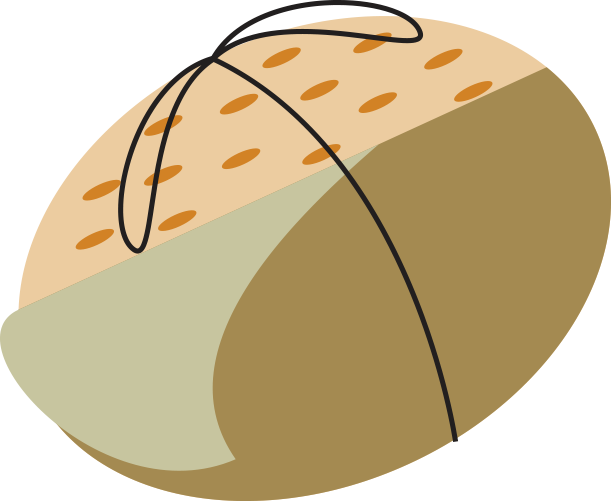
ה ָעם ֶאת- ְב ֵצקו, ֶט ֶרם ֶי ְח ָמץ; ִמ ׁ ְש ֲארֹ ָתם ְצ ֻררֹת

ל ׁ ַש ְּל ָחם ִמן-ה ָא ֶרץ… ַו ִ ּי ָּ ׂשא

ַמ ֵהר ל

ו ֶּת ֱח ַזק ִמ ְצ ַר ִים ַעל-ה ָעם,

The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country… So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks **on their shoulders.**

Bread on their shoulders: that’s how the Israelites carried their matzah when they departed from Egypt, from the house of slavery.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **HAGAR** | **ABRAHAM’S DESCENDANTS** |
| Experiences oppression (עינוי) in Abraham’s household | Experience oppression (עינוי) in Hagar’s “household” (ie Egypt) |
| Name means “the stranger” (גר–ה) | Referred to as “strangers” (גרים) |
| Kicked out into the desert (מדבר) | Kicked out into the desert (מדבר) |
| Gets lost | Get lost |
| Experiences a water crisis | Experience a water crisis |
| Thirst is miraculously quenched | Thirst is miraculously quenched |
| Told not to fear (תיראי אל) | Told not to fear (תיראו אל) |
| Leaves with bread on shoulders | Leaves with bread on shoulders |

## Strangers of Today

In these stories of Hagar and Ishmael, we have the beginning of seeds that come into scary fruition in the Book of Exodus - but seeds that presage our *redemption* as well. Hagar’s experience of oppression: we can hear its echoes in Israelite enslavement, as well as the Exodus from Egypt itself. And the connections don’t end with Egypt. Where else in the Torah do we find mention of הגר (“*ha-ger*”) the stranger?

The answer is: all over the place! Over and over again, the Torah exhorts us to care for the stranger, not to wrong or oppress the stranger - because we *were* strangers, because we know what it feels like.9

In a certain sense, the Exodus from Egypt was all about “us”: the birth of *our* nation, the creation of the Israelites as a distinct and unique entity among peoples. But at the same time, it was the exact opposite: the experience was meant to sensitize us to the plight of the stranger - to those people who don’t quite fit into our nation, who feel like the “other” in our midst. The Torah wanted us to walk out of Egypt with a profound empathy for those who don’t belong. That empathy could have - and should have - begun with the treatment of Hagar.

You see, the Torah is a *guidebook*. It doesn’t just highlight the mistakes of our forefathers and foremothers for no reason; we are meant to actually learn things from these stories.

So what’s the lesson for us today? Even if we can’t remember the last time we threw our maidservant out of our house, we still have strangers in our lives. For one thing, the word *ger* is used to refer to converts. How do we welcome

converts? A *ger* can also be someone who doesn’t share our faith, but is a good and moral person in our midst. How do we treat those people? When you’re walking down the street, do you smile and say “hello” to people who are different than you? Or only to those who are like you?

The Torah doesn’t merely ask that we love our *neighbor* as we love ourselves. It also demands that we love the stranger.

9 For example, see Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 10:19



Vayera: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?

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##### Genesis 15:13

**13** And [God] said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

**Genesis 16:1-11**

ֶהם, ל

ֶא ֶרץ לֹא ּב

ִי ְה ֶיה ַז ְר ֲע ָך ּכי-גר

מאות, ׁ ָש ָנה.

**בראשית טו:יג**

**יג** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ַא ְב ָרם, ָידֹ ַע ֵת ַדע

ו ֲע ָבד ּום, ְו ִע ּנ ּו אֹ ָתם--א ְר ַּבע

#### בראשית טז:א–יא

**1** Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. **2** And

ה ָגר.

אל-

א ְב ָרם, לֹא ָי ְל ָדה ל ֹו; ְו ָל ּה ׁ ִש ְפ ָחה מ ְצ ִרית, ו ׁ ְש ָמ ּה ְב ָרם, ה ֵּנה-נא ע ָצ ַר ִני ְיקוה מ ֶּל ֶדת-- ּבא-נא אל-א

**א** ְו ָ ׂש ַרי א ׁ ֶשת

**ב** ַו ּתֹא ֶמר ׂש ַרי

Sarai said to Abram, “Look, the LORD has kept me from

לקול ׂש ָרי. **ג** ַו ִּת ַּקח ׂשרַי

מ ֶּמ ָּנה; ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע א ְב ָרם,

ָּב ֶנה א

ִש ְפ ָח ִתי, או ַלי

bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a

son through her.” And Abram heeded Sarai’s request. **3** So

ע ֶ ׂשר ׁ ָש ִנים, ל ׁ ֶש ֶבת

את-ה ָגר ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ָת ּה, מ ֵּקץ

א ׁ ֶשת-א ְב ָרם,

Sarai, Abram’s wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—

ל ִא ׁ ָּשה. **ד** וַ ָ ּיבא

ּכ ָנ ַען; ַו ִּת ֵּתן אֹ ָת ּה ל ַא ְב ָרם אי ׁ ָש ּה, ל ֹו

א ְב ָרם ּב ֶא ֶרץ

after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years— and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. **4** He

ַו ֵּת ַקל ְּג ִב ְר ָּת ּה ּב ֵעי ֶני ָה. **ה** ַו ּתֹאמֶר ָנ ַת ִּתי ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ִתי ּב ֵחי ֶק ָך, ַו ֵּת ֶרא ּכי ה ָר ָתה, ע ֶלי ָך--א ֹנ ִכי

אל-ה ָגר, ַו ַּת ַהר; ַו ֵּת ֶרא

ׂש ַרי אל-א ְב ָרם, ח ָמ ִסי

cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she

ֶני ָך. **ו** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר א ְב ָרם ו ֵבי

ּב ֵעי ֶני ָה; ִי ׁ ְש ּ ֹפט ְיקוה, ּבי ִני

ּכי ה ָר ָתה ָו ֵא ַקל

saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in

ּב ָי ֵד ְך--ע ִ ׂשי- ָל ּה, ה ּט ֹוב ּב ֵעי ָנ ִי ְך; ַו ְּת ַע ֶּנ ָה ׂש ַרי,

אל- ָש ַרי, ה ֵּנה ׁ ִש ְפ ָח ֵת ְך

her esteem. **5** And Sarai said to Abram, “The wrong done

ְיקוה, על-עין ה ַּמ ִים-- ַב ִּמ ְד ָּבר: מ ְל ַא ְך

ו ִּת ְב ַרח מִ ָּפ ֶני ָה. **ז** ַו ִ ּי ְמ ָצ ָא ּה

me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now

that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her

על-ה ַע ִין, ּב ֶד ֶר ְך ׁש ּור. **ח** ַו ּיֹא ַמר, ה ָגר ׁ ִש ְפ ַחת ׂש ַרי אי-מ ֶ ּזה באת--

esteem. The LORD decide between you and me!” **6** Abram

ּה ל

ת ֵל ִכי; ַו ּתֹא ֶמר--מ ְּפ ֵני ׂש ַרי ְּג ִב ְר ִּתי, א ֹנ ִכי ֹב ַר ַחת. **ט** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר

ו ָא ָנה

said to Sarai, “Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right.” Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she

ּה ל

ׁש ּו ִבי אל- ְג ִב ְר ֵּת ְך, ְו ִה ְת ַע ִּני, ַת ַחת ָי ֶדי ָה. **י** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ּה ְר ָּבה א ְר ֶּבה את-ז ְר ֵע ְך, ְולֹא ִי ָּס ֵפר, מ ֹרב. **יא** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, ה

ran away from her. **7** An angel of the LORD found her by a

ה ָרה ְויֹ ַל ְד ְּת ּבן, ְו ָק ָראת ׁ ְשמ ֹו ִי ׁ ְש ָמ ֵעאל, ּכי- ׁש ַמע

מ ְל ַא ְך ְיקוה, ה ָּנ ְך

spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, **8** and said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” And she said, “I am running away from my mistress Sarai.” **9** And the angel

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Vayera: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?

Source Sheet Page 2

of the LORD said to her, “Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment.” **10** And the angel of the LORD said to her, “I will greatly increase your offspring, And they shall be too many to count.” **11** The angel of the LORD said to her further, “Behold, you are with child And shall bear a son; You shall call him Ishmael, For the LORD has paid heed to your suffering.

##### Nachmanides on Genesis 16:6

**And Sarai oppressed her and she fled from her presence (literally “face”):** Our mother sinned in this oppression, and also Abraham in permitting her to do so. And Hashem heard her [Hagar’s] oppression and gave her a son who would be a wild ass of a man to oppress the descendants of Abraham and Sarah in all kinds of oppression.

**Genesis 21:9–19**

#### רמב”ן על בראשית טז:ו

**ותענה שרי ותברח מפניה** - חטאה אמנו בענוי הזה וגם אברהם

בהניחו לעשות כן ושמע ה’ אל עניה ונתן לה בן שיהא פרא אדם

לענות זרע אברהם ושרה בכל מיני הענוי

#### בראשית כא:ט–יט

**9** Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne

ה ִּמ ְצ ִרית, א ׁ ֶשר- ָי ְל ָדה ל ַא ְב ָר ָהם--מ ַצ ֵחק.

ׂש ָרה את- ֶבן-ה ָגר

**ט** ַו ֵּת ֶרא

to Abraham playing. **10** She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave

ָּג ֵר ׁש ה ָא ָמה ה ּזֹאת, ְו ֶאת- ְב ָנ ּה: ּכי לֹא ִיי ַר ׁש ְב ִני עם- ִי ְצ ָחק. **יא** ַו ֵ ּי ַרע ה ָ ּד ָבר מאֹד, ּב ֵעי ֵני ל ַא ְב ָר ָהם, ה ּזֹאת, עם-

**י** ַו ּתֹא ֶמר,

ּבן-ה ָא ָמה

shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.” **11**

The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. **12** But God said to Abraham, “Do not be

distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring

ָהם, על, אודֹת ּבנ ֹו. **יב** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר אלֹקים אל-א ְב ָר ָהם, אל- ֵי ַרע ָך על-ה ַּנ ַער ְו ַעל-א ָמ ֶת ָך-- ּכל א ׁ ֶשר תֹא ַמר א ֶלי ָך ׂש ָרה, ׁ ְש ַמע א ְב ָר ִי ְצ ָחק, ִי ָּק ֵרא ל ָך ָז ַרע. **יג** ְו ַגם את- ֶבן-ה ָא ָמה, לג ֹוי ּב ֵעי ֶני ַז ְר ֲע ָך, הוא. **יד** ַו ַ ּי ׁ ְש ֵּכם א ְב ָר ָהם ּב ּ ֹב ֶקר ַו ִ ּי ַּקח- ֶל ֶחם ּבקֹ ָל ּה: ּכי ב א ִ ׂשי ֶמ ּנ ּו: ּכי

shall be continued for you. **13** As for the son of the slave-

אל-ה ָגר ׂשם על- ׁש ְכ ָמ ּה, ְו ֶאת-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד--ו ְי ׁ ַש ְּל ֶח ָה;

ו ֵח ַמת מ ִים ַו ִ ּי ֵּתן

woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed.” **14** Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. **15** When the water was gone from the skin,

ו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ַתע, ּב ִמ ְד ַּבר ּב ֵאר ׁ ָש ַבע. **טו** ַו ִ ּי ְכל ּו ה ַּמ ִים, מן-ה ֵח ֶמת;

ו ַּת ׁ ְש ֵל ְך את-ה ֶ ּי ֶלד, ַת ַחת א ַחד ה ִּ ׂשי ִחם. **טז** ַו ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב ל ּה מ ֶּנ ֶגד, ה ְר ֵחק ּכ ְמ ַט ֲח ֵוי ֶק ׁ ֶשת, ּכי א ְמ ָרה, אל-א ְר ֶאה ּבמ ֹות ה ָ ּי ֶלד; ַו ֵּת ׁ ֶשב

מ ֶּנ ֶגד, ַו ִּת ָּ ׂשא את-קֹ ָל ּה ַו ֵּת ְב ְּך. **יז** ַו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ַמע אלֹקים, את-קול ה ַּנ ַער,

ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא מ ְל ַא ְך אלֹקים אל-ה ָגר מן-ה ׁ ָּש ַמ ִים, ַו ּיֹא ֶמר ל ּה מה- ָּל ְך ה ָגר;

she left the child under one of the bushes, **16** and went

ּב ֲא ׁ ֶשר הוא- ׁשם. **יח**

ה ַּנ ַער אל-קול

ׁש ַמע אלֹקים ּכי-

אל- ּתי ְר ִאי,

and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she

את- ָי ֵד ְך ב ֹו: ּכי- ְלג ֹוי ָּגד ֹול, א ִ ׂשי ֶמ ּנ ּו.

ַּנ ַער, ְו ַה ֲח ִזי ִקי את-ה

קו ִמי ׂש ִאי

thought, “Let me not look on as the child dies.” And sitting

ֵּת ֶל ְך ַו ְּת ַמ ֵּלא את- מ ִים; ַו

ֵאר ּב

**יט** ַו ִ ּי ְפ ַקח אלֹקים את-עי ֶני ָה, ַו ֵּת ֶרא

thus afar, she burst into tears. **17** God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. **18** Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great

מ ִים, ַו ַּת ׁ ְש ְק, את-ה ָּנ ַער.

ה ֵח ֶמת,



Vayera: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael and...Exodus?

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nation of him.” **19** Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink.

##### Exodus 12:34

**34** So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders.

**Exodus 14:3**

ּב ִ ׂש ְמלֹ ָתם,

צ ֻררֹת

מ ׁ ְש ֲארֹ ָתם

ֶרם ֶי ְח ָמץ; ט

ְב ֵצקו, את-

#### שמות יב:לד

**לד** ַו ִ ּי ָּ ׂשא ה ָעם

ַעל- ׁש ְכ ָמם.

#### שמות יד:ג

**3** Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.”

ִּמ ְד ָּבר. ה

ֵלי ֶהם, ע

ס ַגר

ָא ֶרץ; ּב

ל ְב ֵני ִי ְ ׂש ָר ֵאל, ְנ ֻב ִכים הם

ְרעֹה ַפ

**ג** ְו ָא ַמר

##### Exodus 14:13

**13** But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by,

את- ְי ׁש ּו ַעת ו ְראו

אל-ה ָעם, אל- ּתי ָראו--ה ְת ַי ְ ּצב ּו

#### שמות יד:יג

**יג** ַו ּיֹא ֶמר מֹ ׁ ֶשה

and witness the deliverance which the LORD will work for

ְצ ַר ִים ה ּי ֹום-- את-מ

ה ּי ֹום: ּכי, א ׁ ֶשר ְר ִאי ֶתם

יקוה, א ׁ ֶשר- ַי ֲע ֶ ׂשה ל ֶכם

you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again.

ֹו ָלם. עד-ע

ְראֹ ָתם ע ֹוד, ל

לֹא תֹ ִספו

**Exodus 23:9**

#### שמות כג:ט

**9** You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the

ִיי ֶתם, ה

ֵּגר-- ִכי-ג ִרים ה

ֶפ ׁש את-נ

ְו ֵגר, לֹא ת ְל ָחץ; ְו ַא ֶּתם, ְי ַד ְע ֶּתם **ט**

feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

מ ְצרָ ִים.

ּב ֶארֶץ

**Deuteronomy 10:19**

#### דברים י:יט

**19** You must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

ְצ ָר ִים. מ

ֶא ֶרץ ּב

ִיי ֶתם, ה

ִרים ּכי-ג

ֵּגר: את-ה

**יט** ו ֲא ַה ְב ֶּתם,