

Parshas Vayeira

This week's Parsha, Vayeira, reveals that Hashem appears to Avraham while Avraham is recovering from his circumcision, and the angels come to visit on their mission to heal him. Update Sarah on her giving birth and destroy Sodom.

Sarah is criticized for laughing, but if you look through the pesukim, there are breaks suggested in most printed Chumashim that can hint at a different reading of the Pesukim. You will see that Sarah denied laughing; she clarified that she was a believer. Look at the lines that break down chapter 18:15 and Rashi. Rashi points out that the word "Ki" can mean 'because', 'perhaps', 'if', and 'but'. Meaning Sarah was being asked for clarification on her "laugh". But if we translate the root of the word "Tzchok" as "rejoice," then the Pesukim are asking for clarification: was it a laugh or rejoicing? So, the initial interpretation of Sarah's reaction was a laugh of shock, and the posuk clarifies whether Hashem can do anything. When pushed, Sarah clarifies that her laugh was out of fear—not of punishment, but of Hashem—and that she was rejoicing. Then the posuk concludes, almost as a warning to be careful, that the outward interpretation of the reaction could be read as a laugh and misunderstood by another party. Meaning even if someone had the right intentions, another person could misinterpret their reaction, and it would be essential to clarify. Often, people misinterpret someone's intentions from a person's intonation or other facial expressions; care should be taken to ensure it isn't

misinterpreted. I am spending time trying to explain Sarah's reaction, because it seems odd that Sarah wouldn't have the belief she did, especially since in last week's Parsha, Avraham and Sarah are told they will have a son named Yitzchak, and Avraham laughed as well. Chasam Sofer and Ramban delve into this, and it seems that there are two types of laughs. Outward ones with your mouth are joyful, internal chuckles are ridicule. Chasam Sofer, though, explains that while Sarah's first laugh was ridicule, Hashem highlights this because only Hashem can know your internal thoughts. But Yom Kippur had passed, based on the times of year (Pesach being when the angels first came), and Sarah had asked for forgiveness, so her laugh and denial in the Posuk is to validate that she turned her first laugh into one of Joy.

Later in the Parsha, 19:2, when the angels come to visit Lot, Lot asks them to go inside and wash their feet, unlike Avraham, who asked the angels to wash their feet first, then come inside. Rashi by Avraham explains that, since dust was considered idolatry, Avraham was careful to make sure they washed. With Lot, perhaps he didn't care about the idol worship, which made them come inside first. But Rashi offers a different explanation: that Lot wanted to make sure his guests looked as if they had just arrived, so the Sodomites wouldn't try to kill them (as if Lot had been hosting them, and they weren't taken advantage of. If they had washed feet, then it would imply that they have already been hosted, which was antithetical to the Sodomites). Explaining the difference that Lot didn't care about idolatry seems to contradict the earlier explanation, meaning Lot

could have cared about idolatry, but was worried for his life. Rashi draws from Bereishis Rabba to explain that Lot was trying to save his life by not making the guest wash their feet, so the people of Sodom wouldn't try to kill Lot.

The difference ends up being more esoteric. Avraham would be willing to sacrifice himself for the three cardinal sins. Meaning: Avraham, Rashi points out, suspected idol worship and required the guests to wash their feet before coming inside. In contrast, Lot, who was looking to save his life by not making the guest wash their feet, was not built of the same stock as Avraham. Lot saw that he was in physical danger from the townsfolk and, therefore, overlooked the potential issue of idol worship. But Lot's desire for Hachnasas Orchim (from which he learned from Avraham- see 19:1 and Rashi there) meant that he was righteous enough to be saved. In the end, Lot was willing to protect his guests at all costs, albeit in a different way than the Mesiras Nefesh of Avraham. The lot is called "man" in 19:9, indicating that he was recognized as complete and righteous for his heroic act in protecting his guests.

One final point: in Perek 19, Rashi explains that the angels delayed their travel to Sodom on "Erev" to see if Avraham would have time to defend the people against destruction. This is like my point about Noach needing to be ushered into the Teiva to see if, even at the last moment, the people would repent as the rain began to fall. Meaning that all is not lost, and even at the final moments, the outcomes can change if repentance or salvation is required. Daas Zekeinim here points out that the angels warned Lot of the destruction of Sodom, and

volunteered this information, because they weren't sure that Lot would listen had they not stated their purpose (and they were punished for it). Meaning this is consistent with the idea that trying to warn the people would result in the salvation of Sodom, even if Avraham had been petitioning on its behalf.

In conclusion, the Torah doesn't waste words or leave uncertainty. All parts are there for a reason, and something we can use in our lives today.

Good Shabbos