



VAYEIRA 5786

In the preface to the destruction of S'dom and the surrounding cities, the Torah states: "And Gd said, 'Shall I conceal from Avraham what I am doing?' And Avraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the world shall be blessed in him? For I have known him because he commands his children and his household after him, that they shall keep the way of Gd, to perform righteousness and justice, in order that Gd may bring upon Avraham that which He spoke concerning him." (18:17-19)

The questions are many. First, why in this instance does HaShem feel obliged to share with his faithful servant what His intentions are for S'dom? Second, why are we being told again that Avraham will become a powerful nation when this future had already been promised by HaShem earlier (12:2,3)? And finally, how are we to understand the reason HaShem gives for His revealing to Avraham what He is about to do; to wit: that Avraham will transmit the virtues of TZ'DAKA and MISHPAT to his progeny?

The answer to these questions revolves around a certain truth about Avraham which, Rav Soloveitchik argues, goes to the essence of his greatness. "Avraham was the first teacher, not just to a few, but to tens of thousands, as Rambam writes (Hilchot Avoda Zara 1:3). The community organized around Avraham consisted of students... Avraham's responsibility was to see to it that there was someone to pass on the TZAVA'A [the spiritual will], to create a community of teachers and students; community of MESORAH, of transmission." (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, B'reishit, p. 121)

In other words, Avraham's central life's mission was to educate everyone about the existence of the One Gd and His moral mandate. Everyone: the multitudes Avraham brings "under the wings of the Divine Presence", in Charan (B'reishit Rabba 39:14,16), as well as the members of his immediate household. And because HaShem knows that Avraham willingly chose this assignment, He elects to be Avraham's teacher and educate him in His Divine ways so that Avraham can properly transmit to others how to emulate their Maker. HaShem therefore feels He must convey to Avraham an important lesson. To wit: that when dealing with wicked people, even mercy has its limits. Yes, try to find a critical mass of ten righteous people

to influence a city to mend its ways, but should that fail, the evil must be destroyed.

But the lesson here is much broader with important implications for us. Quite apart from the specific ethical teaching that HaShem wishes to impart to Avraham, what we have here is one of Judaism's most unique characteristics: the fundamental value we place upon education. The message may be obvious, but as the *Mesilat Yesharim* has famously observed, often even the obvious requires repetition and *chizuk*.

Parents, as the Talmud tells us (*Kiddushin* 29a), have many responsibilities toward their children, but primary among them is their obligation to teach them, to train them in the observance of mitzvot and, more generally, to habituate them to behave ethically. It is no coincidence that the Hebrew word for parents is *HORIM*, which derives from the famous mount, *HAR HAMORIYA* which figures prominently in the *Akeida* episode (22:2). The mountain was called such because it was from there that "Torah instruction went out to Israel" (*Ta'anit* 16a). The chief locus for the education of the Jewish child has always been the home. The institution of schools came much later and only because when there were no parents, orphans needed to be taught as well.

Today, because of the exigencies of time and financial pressures, not to mention the Jewish illiteracy of the parents, the Jewish education of the child has been "outsourced" to the school. As such, many parents feel relieved of their responsibility to educate their child. Such an unfortunate and terrible mistake! While it may be true that formal Torah education is now delegated to the rebbi, parents are never to shirk their role as teacher and must always remember that they still remain the major influencer on their child's upbringing.

In discussing to what extent a parent must train his child in the observance of Shabbat, the *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 343:1) rules that in addition to training a minor in the positive mitzvot, there is also an obligation to make sure the child refrains from violating any prohibitions. What is of particular relevance and consequence are the remarks of the *Mishna Berura* (ad loc #3) on the matter.

"Not only is a parent enjoined to discipline his child on Biblical mitzvot, but even Rabbinic restrictions are also mandated... And should a parent hear his son or daughter speaking *lashon hara*, gossiping, lying, cursing, quarrelling and fighting, he must intervene to prevent such untoward behavior." The *Chofetz Chayim* then adds that too many parents fail to

discipline their children in this regard. So much so that even when upon maturity, the child realizes such conduct to be wrong and unseemly, he will find it difficult to break the bad habits he picked up in his younger years when due to parental negligence, these harmful behaviors were ignored.

But long ago in antiquity, this powerful educational ethos was proclaimed by the wisest of all men when he admonished, "Hear, my son, the moral instruction of your father, MUSAR AVICHA, and do not forsake the teachings of your mother, TORAT IMECHA (Mishlei 1:8). Now, however one understands the distinction between the two, Shlomo HaMelech's stern advice is clearly predicated upon both father and mother obeying this unambiguous and explicit directive to educate their child. In fact, the Talmud (Kiddushin 30a) goes even further and encourages even the grandparents to teach their grandchildren Torah.

We conclude again with the obvious. Moshe was our great redeemer, an extraordinary political leader and warrior, and yet, in our tradition, his legendary title is purely Moshe Rabbeinu. Rising above all of his magnificent achievements, his greatest attribute was that of a teacher - and the greatest of our teachers, at that! And Avraham, the first of our

Forefathers, he fought wars, contended with the most famous kings of his time, made treaties and rescued people. But Avraham is known to us simply as Avraham Avinu, our father who taught us. The very first one who instructed us in the ways of his Creator.

Every parent and grandparent should never underestimate how powerful their influence is in the rearing of their children and grandchildren. It is a foundational lesson that the founder of our faith bequeathed to all of us. We must not squander or fritter away this awesome responsibility and mitzva! 🙌