



VAYERA

NOT MY THING? NOT THE POINT.

Stepping Out of Character When the Moment Demands It

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Vayera

G-d reveals Himself to Abraham three days after his circumcision at age ninety-nine; but Abraham rushes off to prepare a meal for three guests who appear in the desert heat. One of the three—who are angels disguised as men—announces that, in exactly one year, the barren Sarah will give birth to a son. Sarah laughs.

Abraham pleads with G-d to spare the wicked city of Sodom. Two of the three disguised angels arrive in the doomed city, where Abraham's nephew Lot extends his hospitality to them and protects them from the evil intentions of a Sodomite mob. The two guests reveal that they have come to overturn the place and to save Lot and his family. Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt when she disobeys the

command to not look back at the burning city as they flee.

While taking shelter in a cave, Lot's two daughters (believing that they and their father are the only ones left alive in the world) get their father drunk, lie with him, and become pregnant. The two sons born from this incident father the nations of Mo'ab and Ammon.

Abraham moves to Gerar, where the Philistine king Abimelech takes Sarah—who is presented as Abraham's sister—to his palace. In a dream, G-d warns Abimelech that he will die unless he returns the woman to her husband. Abraham explains that he feared he would be killed over the beautiful Sarah.

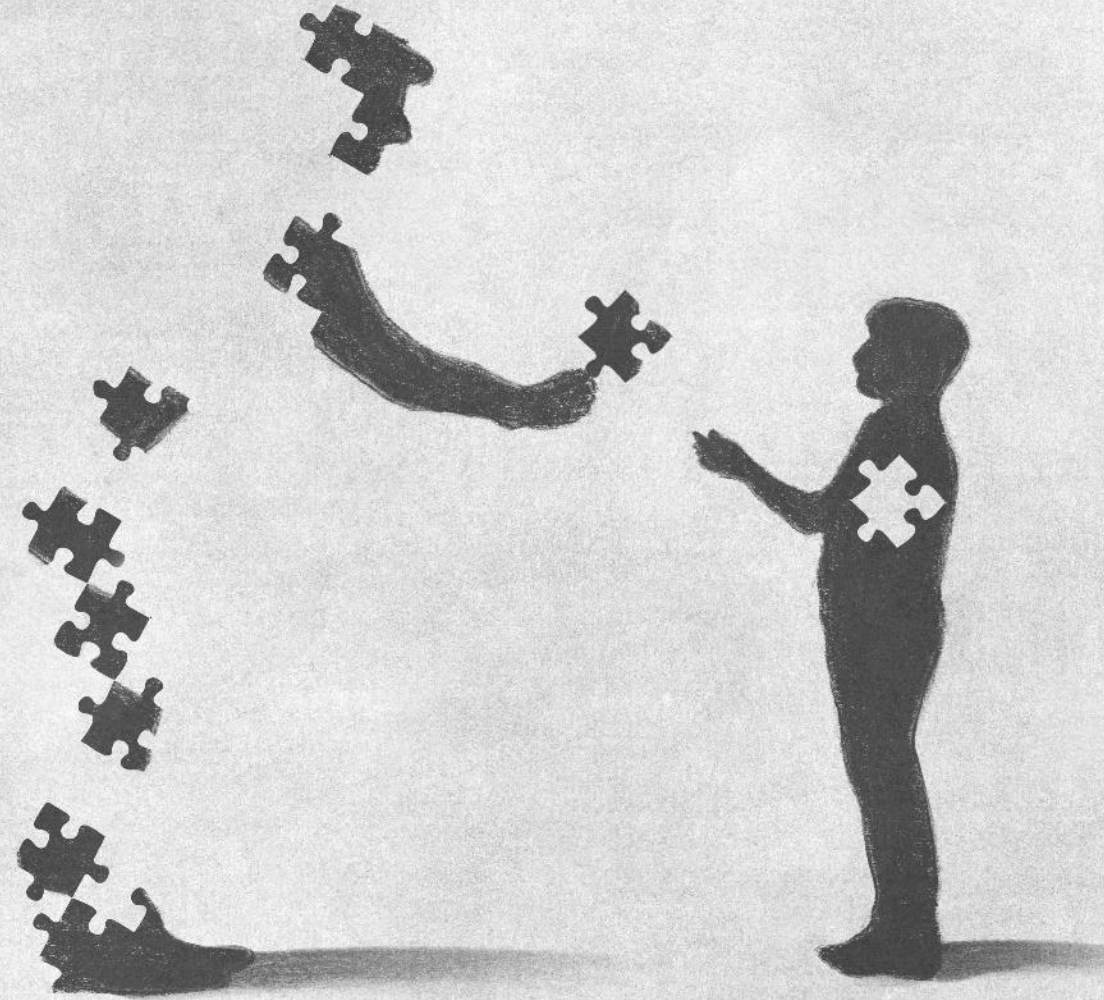
G-d remembers His promise to Sarah and gives her and Abraham a son, who is named Isaac (Yitzchak, meaning "will laugh"). Isaac is circumcised at the age of eight days; Abraham is one hundred years old and Sarah ninety at their child's birth.

Hagar and Ishmael are banished from Abraham's home and wander in the desert; G-d hears the cry of the dying lad and saves his life by showing his mother a well.

Abimelech makes a treaty with Abraham at Beersheba, where Abraham gives him seven sheep as a sign of their truce.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Do you ever use your weaknesses in the service of others?





Three angels arrive at Abraham's door on the way to a mission: the destruction of Sodom and Amarah

TEXT 1

Genesis 18:17-22

יז. וה' אָמַר, הַמְכֹסֶה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה?

יח. וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִיָּה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל
וְעַצּוֹם, וְנִבְרְכוּ בוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ.

יט. כִּי יִדְעַתִּיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְנֶה אֶת
בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו, וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָוֹ ה'
לְעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט, לְמַעַן הֵבִיא ה'
עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלָיו.

כ. וַיֹּאמֶר ה', וְעַקַּת סֹדֶם וְעִמְרָה כִּי
רַבָּה, וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כְבֹדָה מְאֹד.

כא. אֲרִדָּה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה, הַפְּצַעְעֻקְתָּה
הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עָשׂוּ כְלָהּ, וְאִם לֹא אֲדַעָה.

כב. וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאַנְשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה,
וְאַבְרָהָם עֹדֵנּוּ עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי ה'.

17. Now G-d had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

18. "After all, Abraham is to become a great and populous nation, and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him.

19. "For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of G-d by doing what is just and right, in order that G-d may bring about for Abraham what has been promised him."

20. Then G-d said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave!

21. "I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note."

22. The angels went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before G-d.

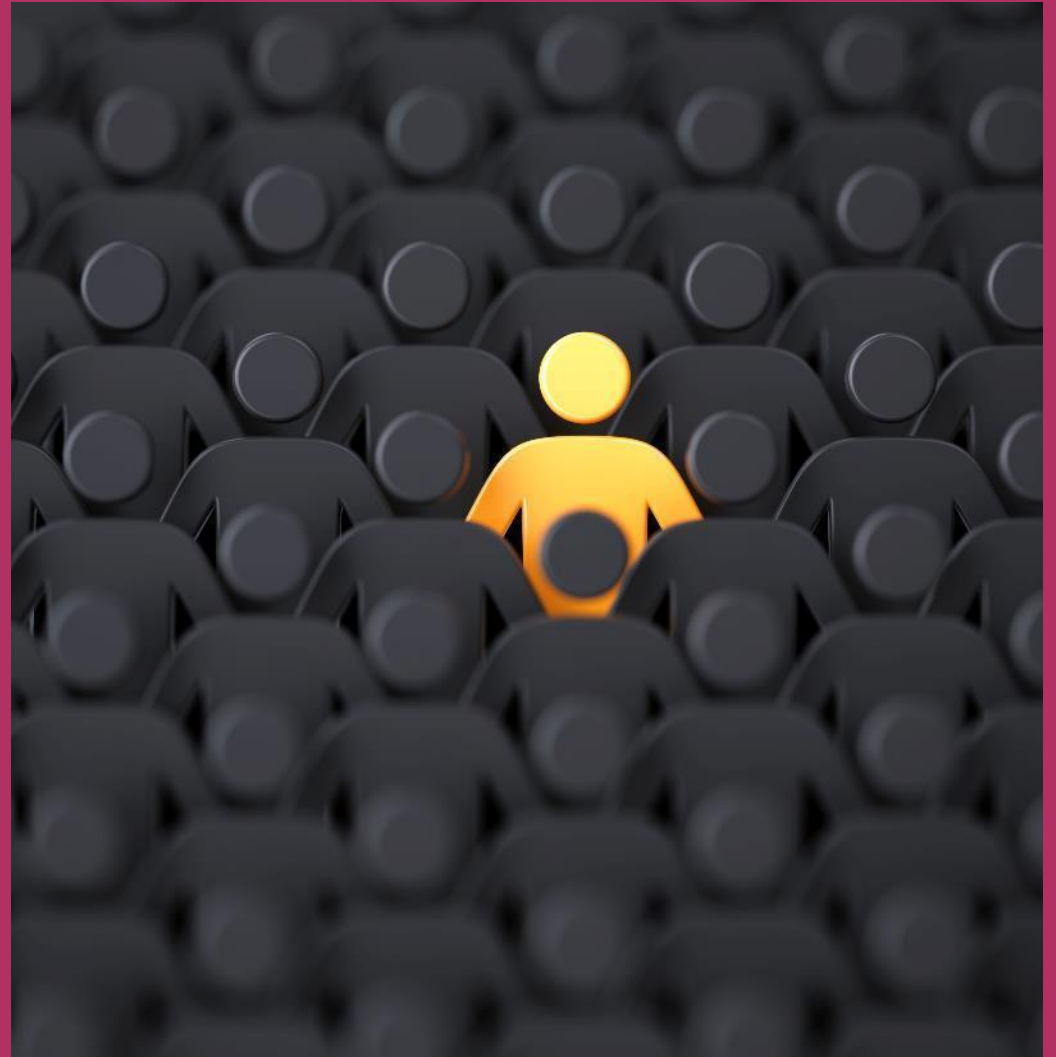
TEXT 2

Genesis 18:23

וַיִּגַשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲאַף תִּסְּפֶה
צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע?

Abraham approached and said, "Will You [actually] destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

Abraham responds
by debating G-d on
the justice of His
decision.



TEXT 3

Genesis 18:24-33

כד. אולי יש חמשים צדיקים בתוך העיר,
האף תספה ולא תשא למקום למען
חמשים הצדיקים אשר בקרבה?

כה. חללה לך מעשת כדבר הזה להמית
צדיק עם רשע, והיה כצדיק כרשע. חללה
לך, השפט כל הארץ לא יעשה משפט?

כו. ויאמר ה', אם אמצא בסדם חמשים
צדיקים בתוך העיר ונשאתי לכל המקום
בעבורם.

כז. ויען אברהם ויאמר, הנה נא הואלתי
לדבר אל אדני, ואנכי עפר ואפר.

כח. אולי יחסרון חמשים הצדיקים חמשה,
התשחית בתמשה את כל העיר? ויאמר,
לא אשחית אם אמצא שם ארבעים
וחמשה.

24. "Suppose there are fifty righteous people in the midst of the city. Will You still destroy it, and not bear with the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people inside it?"

25. "It would be sacrilege [to attribute] to You such an act, to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. It would be sacrilege to attribute this to You: Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?"

26. G-d said, "If, in Sodom, I find fifty righteous within the city, I will bear with the entire place for their sake."

27. Abraham responded and said, "Behold, I have begun to speak to my Master, and I am but dust and ashes."

28. "But suppose they lack five of the fifty righteous? Will You destroy all the city because of five?" He said, "I will not destroy [it] if I find forty-five there."



TEXT 3

Genesis 18:24-33

כט. ויִסַּף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר, אוּלַי
יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים? וַיֹּאמֶר, לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה
בְּעִבּוֹר הָאַרְבָּעִים.

ל. וַיֹּאמֶר, אֵל נָא יִחַר לֵאדֹנָי וְאִדְבָּרָה,
אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים? וַיֹּאמֶר, לֹא
אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים.

לא. וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲנִה נָא הוֹאֲלֹתִי לְדַבֵּר אֵל
אֲדֹנָי, אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים? וַיֹּאמֶר,
לֹא אֲשַׁחֲיִת בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרִים.

לב. וַיֹּאמֶר, אֵל נָא יִחַר לֵאדֹנָי וְאִדְבָּרָה אִי
הַפְּעַם, אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרֶה? וַיֹּאמֶר,
לֹא אֲשַׁחֲיִת בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֶשְׂרֶה.

לג. וַיֵּלֶךְ ה' כַּאֲשֶׁר פָּלָה לְדַבֵּר אֵל אַבְרָהָם,
וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לְמִקְוֹמוֹ.

29. Abraham continued to speak to Him and said,
"Suppose there are forty found there?" He said, "I will
not [destroy] it for the sake of the forty."

30. He said, "Let not my Master show anger, and I will
[continue] to speak. Suppose thirty are found there?"
He said, "I will not [destroy] it if I find thirty there."

31. He said, "Here I wished to speak to my Master.
Suppose twenty are found there?" He said, "I will not
destroy for the sake of the twenty."

32. He said, "Let not my Master show anger, and I will
speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there?"
He said, "I will not destroy for the sake of the ten."

33. G-d departed when He finished speaking to
Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

QUESTIONS

What is the meaning of the words
“Abraham approached”?

Why can't the verse be understood
in a literal sense?

TEXT 4

*Genesis 18:22
(Reprise)*

וַיִּפְּנוּ מִנָּשִׁים הַאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה,
וַאֲבָרָהָם עֹדְדָנוּ עֹמֵד לְפָנָי ה'.

The angels went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before G-d.



Abraham was already in G-d's presence so what did he *approach*?

TEXT 5

*Rabbi Don Yitzchak
Abarbanel, Genesis
18:23*

הנה אברהם כששמע מה' ענין סדום, נגש. ואין
ההגשה הזאת מקומית, אלא שנגש להלחם
בעדם ולהרבות רנה ותפלה עליהם.

When Abraham heard from G-d about Sodom, he “drew near.” This drawing near was not spatial, but rather he drew near to do battle on their behalf and to increase praying for them.

TWO TYPES OF APPROACHING:

A. PHYSICAL

In a basic sense, “**approach**” means moving closer in space, when someone physically steps toward another person.



B. PSYCHOLOGICAL

A more nuanced meaning is to **draw near with intention**, when someone mentally or emotionally engages with a moment or challenge.



ANSWER

“Approach” in this context means to draw near internally. It shows a shift in Abraham’s mindset and an inner transition.

TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 10, p. 56*

לפני "ויגש אברהם" נאמר: "ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה'". הרי מפורש שלא זז אברהם ממקומו "לפני ה'" — ולפי זה אין לפרש "ויגש אברהם" שלאחר זה - הגשה כפשוטה, העתקה ממקום למקום; אלא על כרחך צריך לומר שמובנה "הגשה" ותנועה רוחנית — שיצא ממצב ומעמד נפשי מסוים, ו"נכנס" למצב חדש.

Before the verse "Abraham approached," it says, "Abraham remained standing before G-d." This clearly indicates that Abraham had not physically moved from his place before G-d. Therefore, we cannot interpret "approached" in the simple sense of a physical movement from one place to another. Rather, we're compelled to say that "approach" here refers to a spiritual movement—that Abraham shifted from one inner emotional and mental state to a new state.

TEXT 7

Midrash, Bereshit
Rabah, ch. 49

”וַיִּגַשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר וְגו'” (בראשית יח, כג), רַבִּי יְהוּדָה וְרַבִּי נְחֵמְיָה וְרַבָּנִן. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: הַגִּשָּׁה לְמַלְחָמָה, (דברי הימים א יט, יד) ”וַיִּגַשׁ יוֹאָב וְהָעָם אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ לְפָנָיו אֶרֶם לְמַלְחָמָה”. רַבִּי נְחֵמְיָה אוֹמֵר: הַגִּשָּׁה לְפִיוֹס, הֵיךְ מָה דְאַתָּה אוֹמֵר (יהושע יד, ו): ”וַיִּגְשׁוּ בְנֵי יְהוּדָה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ”. רַבָּנִן אוֹמְרִי: הַגִּשָּׁה לְתַפְלָה, הֵיךְ מָה דְאַתָּה אוֹמֵר (מלכים א יח, לו) ”וַיְהִי כַעֲלוֹת הַמִּנְחָה וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו הַנָּבִיא וַיֹּאמֶר, ה' אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל, הַיּוֹם יִנָּדַע כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְגו'”.

רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר פָּשַׁט לָהּ: אִם לְמַלְחָמָה אָנִי בָּא, אִם לְפִיוֹס אָנִי בָּא, אִם לְתַפְלָה אָנִי בָּא.

“Abraham approached and said . . .” Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Nechemiah, and the sages debated the matter. Rabbi Yehudah said: The term “approaching” means for battle, as in, “Joab and the people who were with him approached Aram to battle” (I Chronicles 19:14). Rabbi Nechemiah said: Approaching means for conciliation, as it says, “The children of Judah approached Joshua” (Joshua 14:6). The sages said: Approaching is for prayer, as it says, “It was at the time of offering up the afternoon sacrifice that Elijah the prophet approached, and he said, ‘G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that You are G-d in Israel . . .’” (I Kings 18:36).

Rabbi Elazar interpreted it: [Abraham said] “If it entails battle, I am coming; if it entails conciliation, I am coming; if it entails prayer, I am coming.”

MEANINGS OF "VAYIGASH"

1. Battle 

2. Appeasement 

3. Prayer 

Abraham was ready for all of them.

TEXT 8

Rashi, Genesis 18:23

"וַיִּגַשׁ אַבְרָהָם." מְצִינוּ הַגִּשָּׁה לַמִּלְחָמָה, "וַיִּגַשׁ יוֹאָב וְגו'"
(שמואל ב' י', יג), וְהַגִּשָּׁה לְפִיּוֹס, "וַיִּגַשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוֹדָה",
וְהַגִּשָּׁה לְתַפְלָה, "וַיִּגַשׁ אֵלָיו הַנָּבִיא" (מלכים א' יח, לו),
וְלִכָּל אֵלֶּה נִכְנַס אַבְרָהָם: לְדַבַּר קָשׁוֹת וּלְפִיּוֹס וּלְתַפְלָה.

"Abraham approached." We find the verb "to approach" used in the sense of coming near to wage war: "So Joab . . . drew near unto the battle" (II Samuel 10:13); of coming near to persuade by entreaty, "And Judah approached him [and said: 'Oh, my lord']" (Genesis 44:18); and of coming near to pray, "And Elijah the prophet approached [and he said, 'G-d of Abraham, etc.']" (I Kings 18:36). Abraham went in with all these methods in mind: to fight by speaking stern words, to persuade by entreaty, and to pray.

Abraham "approached" G-d with total commitment, ready to do whatever it would take to save Sedom.



THREE MODALITIES



תפארת

Tiferet

Beauty and harmony

גבורה

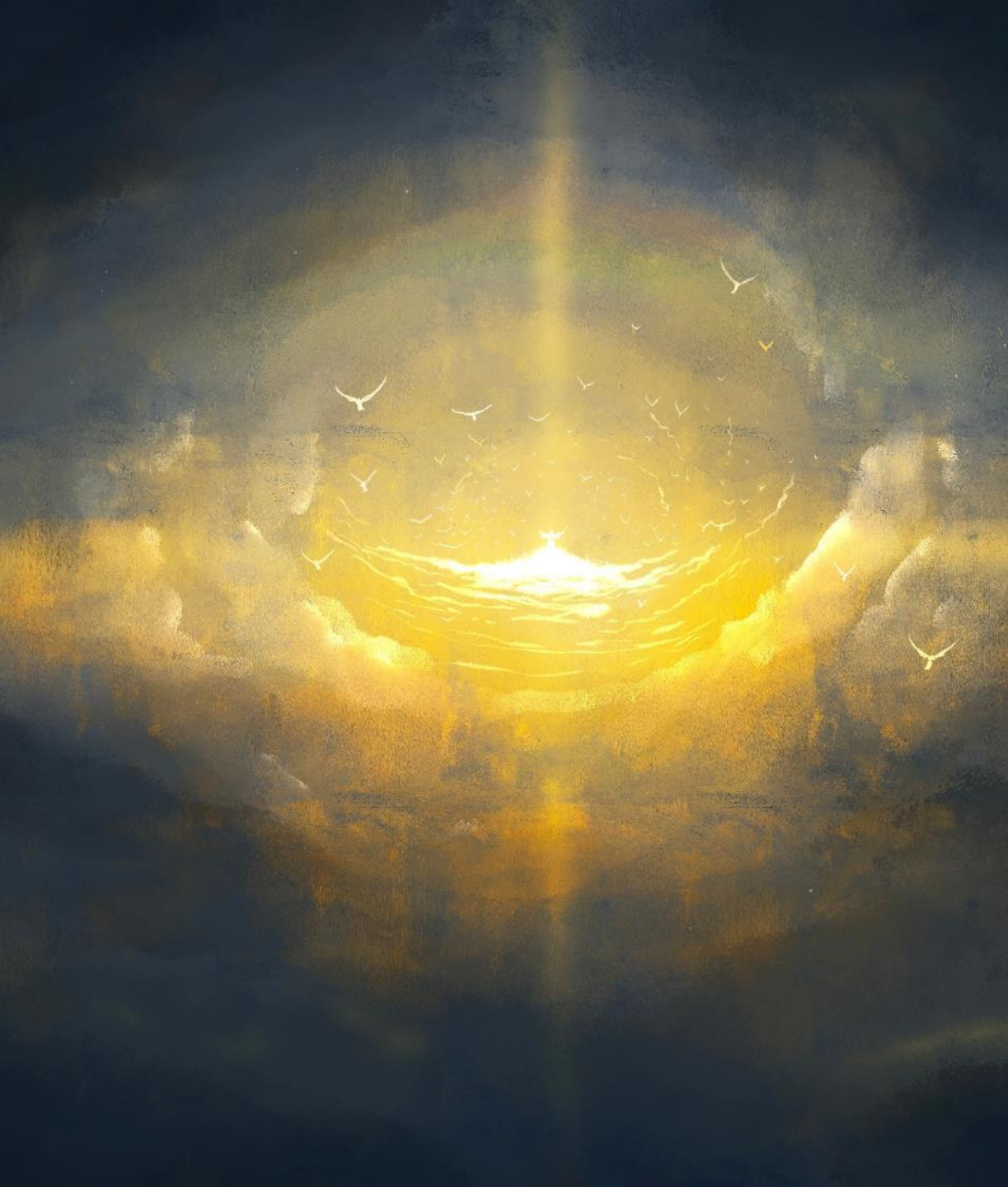
Gevurah

Strength and discipline

חסד

Chessed

Kindness and generosity



Each of the *avot* embodied a distinct Divine attribute that they expressed in their lives and that shaped their relationship with G-d and the world.

TEXT 9

Zohar Chadash,
Toldot 33b

וְכָל חַד וְחַד מֵאַבְרָהָם, יָדַע לִיָּה לְקוֹדֶשׁ אֱלֹהֵי
בְרִיָּהּ הוּא, מִגּוֹ אֲסֻפְקֵי לְרִיאָה דִּילִיָּהּ.

אַבְרָהָם יָדַע לִיָּה מִגּוֹ חֶסֶד, דְּאִיְהוּ מִדַּת
הַגְּדוּלָּה, מִדַּת הַחֶסֶד, יְמִינָא דְּמַלְכָּא.
וְעַל דָּא אֶחֱיֵד בְּהָ, וְלֹא שְׁבִיק לָהּ
לְעֵלְמִין, וְעֵבִיד טִיבוּ עִם בְּנֵי נְשָׂא
וְאוֹקְמוּהָ. דְּהָא עוֹבְדוּי סְלִיקוּ לִיָּה
בְּהָאֵי דְּרַגְא.

יִצְחָק יָדַע לִיָּה בְּדְרַגְא דְּגְבוּרָה, דְּאִקְרִי
פְּחַד יִצְחָק, וְדַחִיל לִיָּה לְעֵלְמִין.

יַעֲקֹב יָדַע לִיָּה מִגּוֹ דְּרַגְא דְּתִפְאַרְת, דְּאִיְהוּ
כְּלִיל מַחֲסָד וּמְפַחַד, וְאִקְרִי
אֶמֶת, וְאֶחֱיֵד בְּהָ. הֵדָּא הוּא דְּכִתְיֵב:
(מִיכָה ז, כ) "תִּתֵּן אֶמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב."

Each one of the patriarchs knew G-d through his own unique lens.

Abraham knew Him through Chesed (kindness), which is the attribute of Gedulah (greatness), the right hand of the King. That is the trait he grasped and never abandoned. He constantly did good for people, and this was established about him, for his actions aligned with that spiritual level.

Isaac knew Him through the attribute of Gevurah (strength), for he is called "the fear of Isaac," and he remained in awe of Him always.

Jacob knew Him through the attribute of Tiferet (beauty/harmony), which is a blend of Chesed and Pachad (fear/strength), and is called Emet (truth). This was the trait he embraced. This is what is written (Micah 7:20): "You will give truth to Jacob."

THREE MODALITIES



תפארת

Tiferet

Beauty and harmony



Jacob

גבורה

Gevurah

Strength and discipline



Isaac

חסד

Chessed

Kindness and generosity



Abraham

Abraham embodied the attribute of Chesed and was naturally a man of kindness.

He stepped out of his comfort zone to confront G-d and appeal to all three Divine attributes.



TEXT 10

Rabbi Yehudah Loew,
Gur Aryeh, Genesis
18:23

ודע כי רבותינו זכרונם לברכה במדרש הזה (בראשית רבה מט, ה) רמזו
דבר נעלם מאד.

כי כיון אברהם נגד שלשה שמות "א-ל", "אלקים", "ה". כי נגד שם
"אלקים" שהוא מדת הדין, דבר קשות, מלחמה. ונגד שם "א-ל" הוא מדת
החסד, דבר פיוס. ונגד "ה" המיוחד אליו התפלה והרחמים.

Know that our sages, of blessed memory, hinted at something very profound in
this Midrash (*Bereshit Rabah* 49:8):

Abraham directed his words toward three Divine names—E-I, Elokim, and Havayah.
Corresponding to the name Elokim, which represents strict justice, he spoke
harshly, as if waging battle. Corresponding to the name E-I, which signifies
kindness, he spoke words of appeasement. And corresponding to the name
Havayah (the unique Divine Name), he directed prayer and mercy.

QUESTIONS

What gave him the strength to act so far outside his nature? What was his motivation?

TEXT 11

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 10, p. 58*

ידוע, שמדתו של אברהם היא — אברהם אוהבי. ועל פי זה תמוה: איך יתכן שאברהם ידבר קשות, ובפרט — להקדוש ברוך הוא!?

ויתירה מזו: מכל הג' דברים (מלחמה פיוס ותפלה) התחיל אברהם ב"לדבר קשות", שמזה מובן, דאף ש"לכל אלה נכנס אברהם", בכל זאת עיקר הגשתו היה "לדבר קשות" — ולכאורה מצד האהבה שלו צריך היה להתחיל בפיוס ותפלה?

It is well known that Abraham's defining trait is "Abraham, My beloved" (Isaiah 41:8). So it's puzzling: How is it possible that Abraham would speak harshly, and especially to G-d?!

Even more: Of the three approaches (battle, appeasement, and prayer), Abraham began with "speaking stern words (harshly)." From this, we understand that although "Abraham [employed] all these methods," nevertheless, his initial approach was to "speak stern words." Now, given his deep love, shouldn't he have started with appeasement and prayer?

TEXT 12

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hamaamarim
Kuntresim, vol. 1, p.
167*

הנה עוד זאת אנו רואים בעשיית הטוב
והחסד דאברהם אבינו עליו השלום,
שלבד זאת שעשיותיו היו בהבחנת השכל
וכוונה פנימית – כדי לקרב את הבריות
לאלקות – הנה עצם עשיית הטוב והחסד
לא היתה מצד טבעו הטוב, אלא בגלל
שזהו רצון ה'. כי כך הוא אמיתת קיום
המצוות, שקיום המצוות צריך להיות אך
ורק מפני שכך גזר רצונו יתברך . . .

וכך הייתה עבודתו של אברהם אבינו
עליו השלום במידתו – מידת החסד,
שכל עשיותיו לא היו מצד טבעו הטוב,
אלא לשם קיום רצון ה'. ולכן כאשר לא
פעלה כוונה זו — נראתה בו גם מידת
הדין והגבורה.

We see another profound aspect in the way our forefather Abraham acted with goodness and kindness: Of course, he was guided by intellect and deep inner intention, with the goal of bringing people closer to G-d. But his acts of goodness and kindness were not just the result of his naturally good character; rather, because it was G-d's will. This is what it means to truly carry out a mitzvah: exclusively because this is what G-d wants.

This was the way Abraham served G-d even with his trait of kindness: Everything he did wasn't driven by his inherently kind nature but rather in order to fulfill G-d's will. Therefore, when the particular Divine intention of Chesed (kindness) was not applicable, he also displayed the attributes of judgment and strength (Gevurah).

ANSWER

Abraham acted beyond his nature because he understood it wasn't about him. His motivation was to fulfill G-d's will, adapting his approach to what the moment required rather than following his personal inclinations.

TEXT 13

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 10, p. 59*

והובא כל זה בתורה — הוראה לכל אחד ואחד מבני אברהם:

כשבא לאדם ענין הנוגע להצלת נפש מישראל בגשמיות, או ברוחניות – לקרב לבם של ישראל לאביהם שבשמים – אסור לו לחשוב "חשבונות" וכו', אלא צריך להתעסק בזה בכל כחו וגם באופן שהוא היפך טבעו – אף "לדבר קשות", ולהשתדל בכל האמצעים האפשריים – למלחמה לפיוס ולתפלה.

This episode in the Torah is a powerful instruction to all of Abraham's children:

When a situation arises involving saving a Jewish soul, whether in physical or spiritual danger, to bring the hearts of Jews closer to their Father in Heaven, don't hesitate or calculate. Get involved with all your strength, even in a manner that feels contrary to your nature, even if it involves "speaking harshly." Make use of all available means: battle, appeasement, and prayer.



Abraham shows that personal weaknesses can become strengths when they serve a higher purpose.

When G-d calls, we are meant to act beyond our nature, doing whatever it takes to fulfill our mission.

KEY POINTS

1. Abraham forcefully debated G-d on His decision to destroy the city of Sodom.
2. The Torah describes his efforts as an “approach”—indicating the internal shift Abraham made to take on this aggressive approach.
3. Abraham was naturally a man of kindness. This confrontational approach ran deeply against his nature.
4. He used this approach because he understood that even his own nature wasn't about him but rather because G-d wished it to be so. So when the moment demanded that he switch gears, that's what he did.

