

בראשית י"ח:א' וַיָּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵה וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֵהֶל בְּחֹם הַיּוֹם:

**18:1** *The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot.* Strange place to be at the heat of the day. Solitary, recovering from the circumcision, pondering. But also looking out. Possibly for people. He is living in an environment in which survival is dependent on people looking out for one another.

י"ח:ו-ז' וַיִּמְהַר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵהֶלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מִהָרִי שָׁלַשׁ סָאִים קִמַח סֹלֶת לְיֹשֵׁי יַעֲשֵׂי עֲגוֹת: וְאֶל־הַבְּקָר רֵץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בֶּן־בְּקָר רֶדֶ וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַנְּעָר וַיִּמְהַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ:

**18:6-7** *Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three se'ahs of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it.* There is great drama. How would you direct the actors in this scene? There's urgency but there's also tension. We all know how long it takes to prepare a meal, but here it is being done at break-neck speed! The root מ.ה.ר. is repeated three times. A play on the name א.ב.ר.ה.ב. Interesting.

י"ח:כ"ב ... וְאַבְרָהָם עוֹדֵנו עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי ה':

**18:22** *The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Abraham: God has just disclosed his intention for Sodom. Do I speak or do I stay silent? What He wants to do Sodom is unjust. Do I go home, or remain here?*

י"ח:ל"ב ... אוֹלֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֲשָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁחֵית בְּעַבְדִּי הָעֹשֶׂה צְדָקָה:

**18:32** *What if ten should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten." God: You know and I know there are no righteous people there. It is painful for Me too.*

י"ט:א' וַיִּבְאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סָדְמָה בַּבֶּרֶב וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־סָדְמָה וַיִּרְאֵה לֹט וַיָּקָם לִקְרֹאתָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲפָיִם אַרְצָה:

**19:1** *The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the ground...A study of contrasts: Abraham is rural; Lot is urban. Abraham has his encounter during the day; Lot at night. Abraham is sitting at the entrance of his tent; Lot, at the gates of the city. What do you do*

at the gate? At night? The gate is the public square. People are around. At the gate you strive to be a *macher*; at the entrance of your tent, you strive to be *mensch*.

י"ט:ז' וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־גַּם אַחֵי תְרַעְוּ:

**19:7** *and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not commit such a wrong.* The men of Sodom want to violate Lot's guests. Lot belongs to that society but clearly, he has his differences. What is the significance of the *door* in this scene? The door is the boundary between Lot and the men of Sodom. Lot joins them and closes the door behind him. In attempting to placate them, he calls them *brothers*. But he is not their *brother*. At one point Abraham and he were *brothers*. The angels yank him back inside. Evidently, restoring Lot to his proper zone requires divine assistance.

י"ט:כ"ד וְהָהֵמָּטִיר עַל־סָדְמָה וְעַל־עַמְרָה גְפָרִית וְנָאֵשׁ מֵאֵת הַמֶּן־הַשָּׁמַיִם:

**19:24** *the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven.* Evidence of this destruction exists to this day. Scientists believe that around this time there was a massive airburst meteor explosion that devastated a once fertile area and left it uninhabitable for several centuries.

י"ט:ל"ו וַתִּהְיֶינָה שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת־לוֹט מְאֻבְּיָהוּ:

**19:36** *Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father.* Surely one of the most troubling stories in the entire Bible. The story is an inversion of the Noah story. Noah survives with his sons. Lot survives with his daughters. Noah's sons repopulate the world with their wives. Lot's daughters *want to repopulate* the world through Lot. After the Flood, Noah gets drunk out of his own volition. Lot gets drunk because of his daughters' volition. Noah survives and builds a tent. Lot survives and flees to a cave. כ:א' וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם אַבְרָהָם אַרְצָה הַנִּגְבַּב וַיִּשָּׁב בֵּין־קְדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיִּגַּר בְּגָרָר:

**20:1** *Abraham journeyed from there to the region of the Negeb and settled between Kadesh and Shur. He was sojourning in Gerar... No reason is given for his departure. But Rashi as usual nails it: Abraham saw that there were no more passersby (to tend to) because of the destruction. Or, he needed to put distance between himself*

and Lot because of Lot's depravity. See above.

**כ"י"א** ויאמר אברהם כי אמרתי רק איך ראית אלקים במקום הזה והרגוני על-דבר אשתי:

**20:11** "I thought," said Abraham, "surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. But ironically, there was a lot offear of God in that place! Compare Avimelekh's behavior to Pharaoh's in the similar story last week. Pharaoh tries to move on Sarai but is afflicted. Avimelekh does not behave dishonorably to her. Abraham learns from this that *fear of God* is not his exclusive domain.

**כ"י"ח** כי-עצר עצל ה' בעד פלגהם לבית אבימלך על-דבר שרה אשת אברהם:

**20:18** for the LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. This odd piece of information delivered by the last verse in this story invites speculation. A communal outbreak of infertility is not self-evident. Months must have transpired before they could have discovered this anomaly. Avimelekh's enclave embraces life, procreation, and lives with hope.

**כ"א:ד'** נמל...

**21:4** (Abraham) circumcised... Observation: the consonant cluster מ.ל. occurs many many times (~17 by my count) in this story. We start with נמל he circumcised and we end with נמלא – she filled (the skin with water). Here are some more:

מן מלל אברהם. ויגמל. ועש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל. בעיני אברהם על. ויאמר אלקים אל-אברהם אל-ירע ועל-אמתך. את-בן-האמה לגוי. שם על-שכמה. לה מנגד. וישמע אלקים. ויקרא מלאך אלקים ויאמר לה מה-לה הגר אל-תיראי כי-שמע אלקים אל-קול. ותלה ותמלא את-החמת מים. ותרח-לו אמר

I don't think this is a coincidence. All the crucial words of the story have these consonants. And the crucial moment where the angel speaks to Hagar is a pun with those consonants: *Malakh Elokim - Mah Lakh Hagar*.

**כ"ב:ו'** ויקח אברהם את-עצמי העלה ולשם עלי-צחק בנו ויקח בידו את-העץ ואת-המאכלת וילכו שניהם יחדיו:

**22:6** Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. In the previous story, Abraham puts water and bread on Hagar's (his soon to be dispatched wife) shoulder. Here he puts wood (for fire) on Isaac (his soon to be detached son). A sacrificial animal is placed on top burning wood and coals. Isaac is a walking inversion of sacrifice.

**כ"ב:ט'** ויבאו אל-המקום אשר אמר-לו האלקים ויבן שם אברהם את-המזבח ויערף את-העצים ויעקל את-יצחק בנו וישם אתו על-המזבח ממעל לעצים:

**22:9** They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham builds the altar (probably an array of stones like a pit). He arranges the wood in the fire-pit – but wait! He doesn't light the wood! This makes no sense! In every single incidence of sacrifice, the fire is already lit before the sacrifice! Even in outdoor cooking today, you build your fire first, then you prepare the animal. Then you burn it. Which begs the question: why does he bind Isaac? This is the most unusual detail of a most unusual story. Large animals may require restraint, but Isaac? To review: Abraham builds the altar. Arranges the wood. Ties up Isaac, exactly how? Hands to feet in front? In back? In a bundle? He brings him from somewhere else – close? far? Does he carry him? – and then places him on the unlit wood. The knife is somewhere nearby. Is it close? Far? (v. 10) *Abraham reaches for the knife. Abraham takes the knife. The angel calls out to him...*

**כ"ב:י"ב** ויאמר אליהשלה גדך אליהעזר ואל-תעש לו מאומה כי ועתה ידעתי כי-יגרא אלקים אתה ולא השכפת את-בנה את-יחידך ממני:

**22:12** And he said, "Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me." Does the angel speak to him before or after he takes the knife? Is the blade far from his neck or about to pierce him? So many artistic renderings of this scene have shaped our image of it, but read it again with fresh eyes. Taking the knife to slaughter him doesn't necessarily mean that the blade was resting against his throat. **Do not do anything to him.** How can the angel say this to Abraham? He's done so much to him already! He's taken him on this journey. He's tied him up. He placed him on the wood. Maybe he's saying, *do not do anything more to him!* Traditional interpretations read *withheld* as Abraham's willingness to not withhold Isaac as a sacrifice. But the Hebrew *השכת* actually means *spared* as in *to be spared from danger*. Angel: **You have not spared your son, your only one, from danger.** God has intervened. Isaac lives but has not been *spared*. Abraham has sacrificed his **relationship** with Isaac, which he never regains. (Yoram Hazony).

Shabbat Shalom!