



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Bereshit

Parshat Vayera

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The Ultimate Sacrifice

By Noah Gorsky

It's a difficult time, like time immemorial, to be a Jew.

This past summer, my family and I had the privilege of going to Israel for the first occasion since the pandemic began. It was my younger son Shai's initial visit; he's two years old. He and his older brother, Leo, four, were effectively seeing the country for the first time.

In this week's *Parsha*, we learn about the *mitzvah* of *Hakhnasat Orchim*—welcoming guests to your home. Abraham showed tremendous kindness to his three guests, especially during a very trying time during the recovery of his *Brit Milah*. He could have easily and reasonably turned his guests away, but he went above and beyond as a gracious host.

While staying primarily in Tel Aviv, we took the opportunity to travel around the country to see more of the 'touristy' attractions, although this time with our children in mind. A highlight of our trip was an excursion to *Eretz Bereshit* (Genesis Land), where we witnessed a reenactment of 'Abraham' and his family, welcoming us as guests. He washed our feet, let us recline under the shade, baked pita bread for us, served us tea, and treated us like royalty. As we wrapped up the tour in the heart of the Judean desert, my son, Leo, turned to me while staring out into the expanse:

"Down there...is that *Hashem*?"

Without missing a beat, my wife, Jordana, replied, "*Hashem* is everywhere."

Seeing Leo and Shai meet 'Abraham' for the first time and learn about our forefathers served as a powerful reminder that the magic of our history can be experienced anew through the eyes of our children. Witnessing the wonder in their eyes as our shared history came to life reinvigorated my faith in God and reaffirmed for me the power of community that allows us to continue in the traditions of our ancestors. Just like our kids literally stand on our shoulders during times of celebration, we metaphorically stand on the shoulders of giants before us.

Through his [original composition](#), *Ki Karov*, Eitan Katz has achieved widespread acclaim in recent years, including a small contingency of rabid fandom in the YIS community. In the song, he quotes a *pasuk* from *Devarim*—a quote from Moses—that we can apply today:

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כי-קרוב אליך הדבר מאד
בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו

This translates to *Because the matter is very close to you. In your mouth and your heart to do it.*

But what exactly is Moses referring to? A broadly held opinion suggests Moses is telling the Jewish people that our faith is very close to us. When my family and I experienced Israel through a historical lens this summer, the *Yiddishkeit* was so *karov* that you could reach out and grab it.

The motif of Jewish sacrifice being so *karov* to us is a throughline in this week's *Parsha* as well. *Vayera* begins with a test of faith as Abraham officially becomes a Jew while undergoing a *Brit Mila* at ninety-nine years old. At the end of the *Parsha*, he is asked to bring *Yitzchak* to the altar as an act of ultimate sacrifice. Of course, scholars understand this to be another test of Abraham's commitment to God and a testament to his enduring faith.

As we learn at the end of our *Parsha*, Abraham is rewarded with a promise:

יִזְכֶּינְךָ אֲבִיבְךָ וְהַרְבֵּה אֲרַבֶּה אֶת-זַרְעֲךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֵל אֲשֶׁר
עַל-שְׁפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׂ זַרְעֲךָ אֶת שְׁעַר אֲיִבּוֹ

*That I will surely bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed
as the stars of the heavens and as the sand that is on the seashore.*

It is no secret that now, as has been the case countless times before, is a particularly challenging time to be a Jew. Perhaps this is a test from God passed

down to Abraham's descendants. Growing negative sentiment perpetuated by a vocal minority, a conflation of Zionism and Semitism, and a trend toward nationalism on the global scale has created a hostile environment for Jews. This might be a challenge, but it might also be the ultimate opportunity to double down on our commitment and proudly display our Judaism as a symbol of our trust in God.

To stand up to the test, as our ancestors did before us may be the ultimate sacrifice.

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Noah Gorsky is a Founding Member of the Weekly Basketball Game, the Young Israel Softball Team, and the Scarsdale Bowling Intramural. He is a doting husband to Jordana, four-time defending Father of the Year to Leo and Shai, and the future Mayor of Scarsdale or New Rochelle, pending ongoing gerrymandering efforts to manipulate the boundaries of the electoral constituency.



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