



**Parshat Vayera: November 15 - 16 2024/Cheshvan 15
Issue 2**

Questions About Questions

By: Tali Novick

The theme of questions is prevalent throughout this week's parsha, specifically questions beginning with the phrase "Ayeih." The word "Ayeih," which means "where," appears four times in Sefer Bereishit, and three out of those four times are in Parshat Vayera. This begs the questions, what is the significance of each of the three instances in which the word "Ayeih" appears, and what can be learned from the fact that this word is repeated numerous times?

The first instance in which "Ayeih" appears in our parsha is when angels come to Avraham's tent to inform him that Sarah will have a baby. The angels ask Avraham, "Ayeih Sarah Ishtecha," "Where is Sarah, your wife" (Bereishit 18:9). The Shadal comments that the angels lead with this question so as not to tell Avraham about the birth of his son in an abrupt manner. After all, the Shadal explains, the angels appear to Avraham as human travelers and not as angels, thereby minimizing the shock of their sudden appearance and surprising news. He further explains that the reason that Sarah is in her tent in the first place is that she is embarrassed about not having children. By asking a question to Avraham about Sarah's location, the angels allow Avraham to answer that Sarah is in her tent. This makes their good news all the more fitting and exciting; Sarah will no longer have to hide in her tent, because she will soon have a child. Thus, the angels give over their news in a question-answer format so that they can properly and most effectively deliver the news of Yitzchak's birth to Avraham. Furthermore, Rashbam comments that the angels do in fact know where Sarah is when they ask Avraham their question, but they choose to ask him anyway, mirroring Hashem's question to Adam of "Ayekah," "where are you," when Adam tries to hide from Hashem in Gan Eden (Bereishit 3:9). Hashem, of course, knows Adam's location, but, as the mefarshim explain, He asks Adam this

question in order to open the conversation. So too here, the angels ask for Sarah's location in order to ease into a conversation with Avraham. Thus, the purpose of the word "Ayeih" in this context is for the angels to deliver good news to Avraham in an appropriate manner.

The word "Ayeih" appears for the second time in this parsha in the context of Lot and the people of Sodom. In this context, two angels, who appear as men, run to Sodom, and Lot offers them refuge in his house. The people of Sodom crowd around Lot's house and shout out, "Ayeih Ha'anashim Asher Bau Eilecha Halayla Hotzieim Eileinu Vneida Otam," "Where are the men who came to you tonight, bring them to us and we will know them" (Bereishit 19:5). The mefarshim explain that the people of Sodom want Lot to bring the men to them so they can interact with them in inappropriate ways. In this case, then, the purpose of the word "Ayeih" is to start a conversation about hurting other people. As opposed to the previous context, "Ayeih" here is used for a very negative purpose.

The last context in which "Ayeih" is used in this week's parsha is Akeidat Yitzchak. Yitzchak notices that Avraham does not have an animal to offer to Hashem and asks his father, "VeAyeih Haseh LeOlah," "And where is the sheep to be sacrificed" (Bereishit 22:7). In this final context, the word "Ayeih" is used to ask a simple and innocent question about Avodat Hashem.

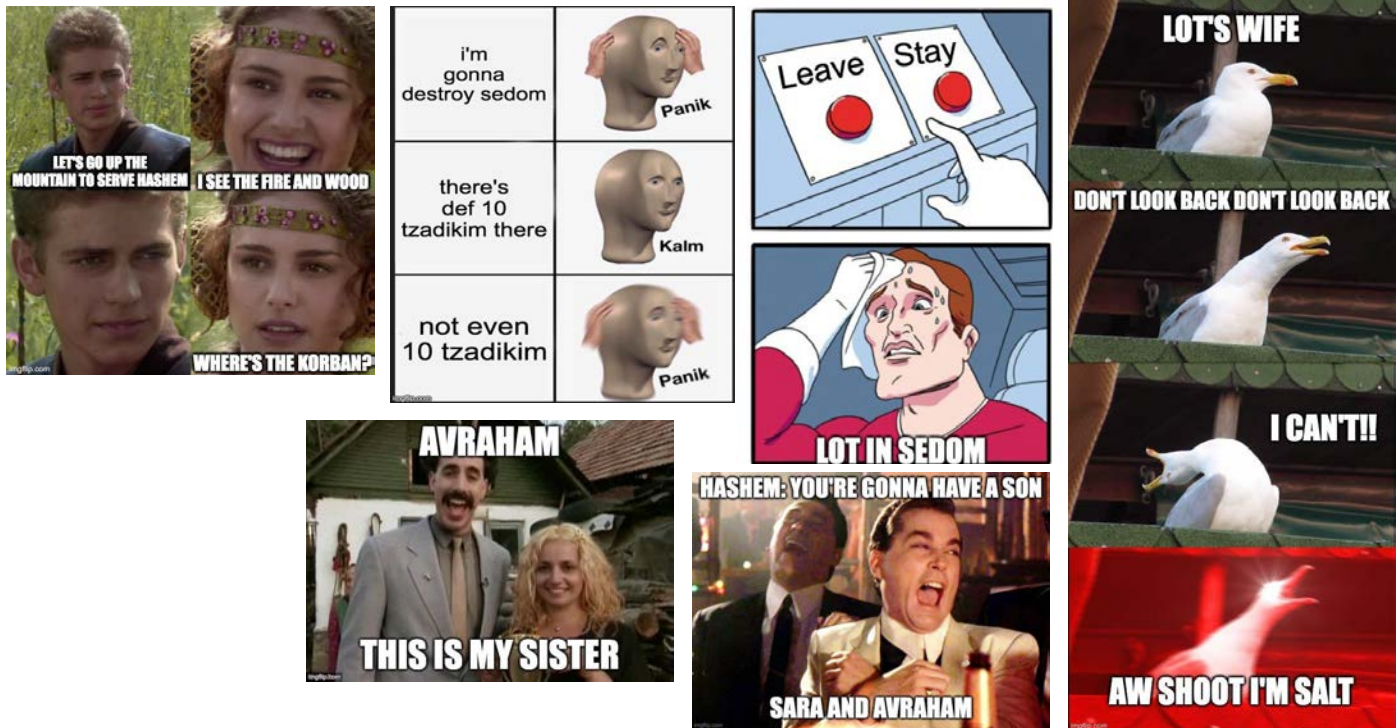
The three instances in which "Ayeih" appear in our parsha are strikingly parallel to the questions of three out of the four sons who ask questions at the Seder. The wise son asks a complex question about the laws of the Seder, paralleling the angels who ask their question to Avraham in a strategic manner. The wicked son asks a question laced with mockery, intending to denigrate Jewish tradition, paralleling the people of Sodom who ask their question with malicious intent, hoping to abuse the men staying in Lot's house. And finally, the simple son asks an innocent and pure question - "what is this" - paralleling Yitzchak's simple question about the lack of an animal to sacrifice.

To further ingrain this connection between the questions of Parshat Vayeira and the questions of the four sons, it is important to note that the episodes in which each of the questions in Parshat Vayeira appear are either directly or tangentially related to children; the angels' question precedes their bearing the news of a child, the Lot narrative concludes with Lot's daughters giving birth to his children, and Akeidat Yitzchak represents the greatest sacrifice that Avraham could ever be asked to make, namely, his own child.

There is, perhaps, a correlation being highlighted between the ideas of **asking questions** and **children**. Parshat Vayeira demonstrates the power of questions; each of the questions in our parsha appears at a critical moment, and in turn serves to further the course of our national story. But we can take this one step further; the symmetry between the questions of Parshat Vayeira and the questions of the four sons displays the fact that questions are doubly powerful when asked by children. Indeed, the idea of children asking questions is a pinnacle idea in our Jewish tradition, and we see traces of this idea rooting all the way back to Avraham. Thus, it is our job to encourage children of all different types, as seen from the sons in the Haggadah, to ask questions, and by doing this, we will be keeping alive the legacy of our most ancient ancestors.

Shabbat Shalom (and early Chag Kasher V'Sameach)!

Parsha Memes: By Elza Koslowe



Aliyah Parsha Trivia!

By: Liela Silbiger

1. Aliyah 1: What does Avraham offer to bring the anashim and what does he actually bring them?
2. Aliyah 2: What numbers did Avraham beg Hashem to save from Sodom if there were that many righteous?
3. Aliyah 3: How did the anashim get the people of Sodom away from Lot's front door?
4. Aliyah 4: What did Lot's daughters name their sons?
5. Aliyah 5: How old was Avraham when Yitzchak was born?
6. Aliyah 6: Why was Beer Sheva called that?
7. Aliyah 7: What is the name of the place of Akeidat Yitzchak and why was it named that?

Joining for Ultimate Achievement

By: Eliana Marcus

In Parshat Vayeira, Avraham faces the ultimate test of faith: the Akedah. This test is the culmination of his lifelong journey of obedience and devotion to Hashem. Comparing this test to his previous nine, this one actively involved a second person: Yitzchak. The Akedah demanded a direct, personal sacrifice involving another person, not just an act carried out on behalf of another that previous tasks entailed.

What made Yitzchak uniquely suited to be the one to undergo this trial alongside Avraham? What was it about the Akedah that made it so significant, to the point that *Berakhot 7a* states that if Avraham had failed this test, it would have been as if he had failed all his previous tasks?

Who was Avraham? A person with a character to give. He desired to share the belief of Hashem to the world. This natural tendency reflects his previous tasks. Presently, his entire journey was defined by the mission to spread kindness and love for God.

The Akeda, then, presented a unique challenge; this was a test that Avraham could not approach from a place of pure chessed. Sacrificing his son demanded restraint and strength, qualities he needed to embrace from Yitzchak. Yitzchak embodied a more inward, disciplined approach to serving God. Unlike his father, he did not venture out into the world; his role was more introspective, grounded in self-discipline and quiet devotion.

But Yitzchak, too, needed something from his father. Yitzchak's role was to trust completely, to surrender in faith, and to accept his father's loving guidance, even as he faced death. The two had to merge their qualities, showing a joint devotion that was both expansive and deeply inward, both loving and fearfully reverent.

This synergy enabled them to achieve a new level of spiritual completeness. Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak, and Yitzchak's willingness to be sacrificed, became a model of perfect unity with God's will—a unity that transcended individual character traits and merged father and son in a shared act of devotion.

This point is emphasized through the Ramban's explanation that since Hashem wanted Avraham to actualize his potential, this test was necessary for Avraham to bring his spiritual qualities to a new height. While Avraham had already demonstrated chessed, the Akedah required him to internalize gevurah as well. Only by integrating this inner strength, often embodied by Yitzchak, could he pass this final test.

When faced with challenges from Hashem, it may be worth considering the potential from collaborating with others, encouraging us to grow beyond our natural tendencies. This expansion isn't just about reaching out to those around us, like Lot or the kings, but also about passing on our connection to Hashem to the next generation, strengthening that bond and ensuring its continuity.

Yitzchak, who would carry forward Avraham's teachings, had now become part of that journey, embodying both the loving-kindness of his father and his own inner strength. Rav Kook describes that the addition of Yitzchak at the Akedah created for Avraham a legacy that was expansive yet enduring.

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Answers to Aliyah Parsha Trivia: He offers - bathe your feet and recline under the tree, a morsel of bread. He actually brings - cakes, calf, curds and milk; 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10; They struck them with blinding light, so that they were helpless to find the entrance; Moav, Ben Ami; 100 years old; For there the two of them swore an oath; Hashem Yireh - on the mount of Hashem there is vision