



## ***We are Torah***

***Vayera***

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I have become acutely aware that children learn what to do by watching those around them. This is, of course, for better or for worse. Watching my three children grow up around us, each other, friends, family and teachers (and with media and television), we can see that everyone (and everything) has some influence on how my children relate to each other, to us and to other people. For better and for worse. Of course, this is not surprising. What is surprising is that more people don't take this reality seriously enough.

In Hebrew, the word for 'parents' is *horim*, which comes from the same root as the word *Torah*, which means 'instruction' or 'teaching,' and the words *moreh* and *morah*, which mean 'teacher'. These three words are connected because as parents, all that we do is Torah for our children. Our lives are like a sacred text on a scroll that add to each and every day. Nothing is omitted. How we get up in the morning, how we get dressed, how we eat, how we speak to each other, how we treat each other, how we talk about ourselves and others, how we spend our free time and how we spend the time with our children, all of these things create a text that our children spend every day learning from and internalizing. Our children become close readers of this sacred text: they read our body language, hear the hidden meanings behind the words, question the inner motives of each action and reaction. The way we live our lives is a kind of Torah. The challenge then is to make the Torah of our lives one that will help our children become healthy, responsible and balanced people as they make their way through the world.

One of the finest exemplars of the idea that how we live our lives is Torah comes from this week's Torah portion, *Vayera*. In last week's Torah portion, *Lekh Lekha*, we met Avram (his original name) as he leaves home and sets off for an unknown land. This week, we find Avraham (his new name) as he is sitting at the entrance to his tent at the heat of the day. Suddenly he notices three men near the tent. The flurry of action that ensues is seen as the prime example of how to perform the mitzvah of *Hachnasat Orchim* (Welcoming Guests) in the entire Torah. Avraham runs to greet them, offers them the hospitality of his home, including shade, water and food. Avraham runs to the tent to get the household to prepare the meal for their guests as quickly as possible. Once they are served, Avraham stands near them as a servant would to serve his master.

There is something fascinating about this episode: this is not a legal text, and yet this narrative is the source for the Jewish law about welcoming guests into our homes. There is not one THOU SHALT nor one THOU SHALT NOT anywhere in this chapter. We learn everything from a close reading of how Avraham treats his guests. In Pirkei Avot 1:5, Beit Shammai has extracted an ethical rule from Avraham when he teaches that one should "say little, and do a lot".

That being said, the idea that how we live our lives is a kind of Torah may be present in the text itself. Rashi, the legendary French rabbinic commentator, has a short comment to one phrase in this narrative that drives the point home. When Avraham rushes back to the tent to give the family instructions for preparing the meal, the Torah says that Avraham gives the lad (or in the Hebrew *na'ar*) the calf to prepare himself. At first glance, this does not seem strange at all. Avraham is the head of a wealthy household with a large staff that can handle daily chores. Rashi adds another dimension to this interaction by commenting that this lad is none other than Yishmael, Avraham's son (and at this time, the only son), and that he gives him the task of preparing the main course to educate him in the mitzvot. From this perspective, Avraham is not only doing *Hachnasat Orchim* (Welcoming Guests), but involving his child in that mitzvah so that he can internalize how to do it on his own.

Avraham was living out his own Torah and got his child doing it with him because this is the best way to help our children internalize the values that they will carry with them their whole lives. Back in the good old days, there were fewer influences on our children. Today, the Torah we teach is being taught alongside the Torah of mass media, other members of the family, friends, and teachers. When these Torahs are in harmony, that's wonderful. When these Torahs conflict with one another, we get problems. I am still confident that we as parents are still the predominant teachers of Torah in the lives of our children, but we need to make our Torah consistent and clear so that our children know exactly what we stand for and how we want to live life.

May it be God's will that the Torah we live in the presence of children is worthy of their understanding and passing on to their children.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Pepperstone  
Rabbi-in-Residence

#### **AS A FAMILY:**

1. Ask your children what they think are the values that are the most important to you.
2. Ask you children what values are most important to them.
3. Compare your lists and see what you value most as a family.
4. What can each member of the family do to reinforce those values to each other?
5. What can members of the family do to live out those values to the larger world?

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION [VAYERA](#), ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. When does Avraham figure out that these three visitors are God's messengers?
2. What is strange about the meal that Avraham serves them?
3. Why has God singled out Avraham?
4. What kind of language does Avraham use when trying to get God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah?
5. Compare Lot's hospitality with Avraham's hospitality. How are they similar? How are they different?
6. What do the men/angels do to the mob so that Lot's family can escape?
7. Which two nations descend from Lot and his daughters?
8. When Avraham asks Sarah to say that she is his sister, are they lying?
9. Why does Sarah send Hagar and Yishmael away?
10. How old is Isaac in the Binding of Isaac?
11. When does Isaac figure out what is going on?
12. What is the test? Does Avraham pass?