

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
VAYEIRA

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

FOR THE SAKE OF THE FEW

We find a curious debate in *Parshas Vayeira*. Hashem decided to destroy the city of *Sodom*, but chose to tell Avraham about His decision. Avraham proceeded to plead for the citizens of *Sodom*, asking, "Would you destroy the righteous with the wicked? Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?"¹

Why does Avraham think that Hashem would destroy the *tzadikim*? Much like Hashem saved Noah and his family during The Flood, wouldn't Hashem similarly save the virtuous members of *Sodom*?

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch² (1808–1888) explains that of course Avraham knew that the *tzadikim* would be spared. Avraham's request wasn't that they survive; rather, he was stating that the righteous would experience terrible emotional pain with the destruction of their fellow countrymen. No doubt the righteous spared no effort in attempting to turn their neighbors to good, and their annihilation would cause the righteous terrible agony.

Therefore, argued Avraham, spare the city of *Sodom*, the terrible, wicked, corrupt city of *Sodom*. Why? So that the good people of *Sodom* should not experience painful feelings.

What an amazing understanding of Hashem's ways! We sometimes hear terrible news, or know of a friend or acquaintance going through a difficult time. Perhaps we say a *tefillah*, but we might tell ourselves that there is nothing we can do. However, we find that the very act of feeling another's pain may spare them from further suffering.

Hashem takes into account all of the repercussions of His actions. There may be an entire city that deserves destruction, but if there will be just a handful of people who will be adversely affected, the decree is averted.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

There are two ways to engage in sharing another's burden — through deed and thought.¹

Because our actions generally follow our thoughts it is important to understand how to train ourselves to focus on others.

One tried and true method is to take a moment to think, "How would I feel if this happened to me?"

When a friend or neighbor tells us about a distressing incident, we might respond with unsolicited advice, platitudes of encouragement or maybe even indifference.

But is that what they truly want to hear? What would we want when sharing a difficult story with a friend? Sometimes we just want to share the story, and know that we are being heard.

The very act of listening to others is a powerful way to heal another's pain. By taking that moment to think about their perspective and how they truly feel, we set ourselves up to be the true friend that we all need.

¹ *Ohr R' Simcha Zissel, Shemos*, Essay 191

¹ *Bereishis* 18:23-25

² *ibid.* s.v. תספה

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*Even though we can't always feel
the immediate effect of Mussar study,
consistent Mussar study creates deep
impressions in our subconscious,
which combine over time to create
real change.* - Chacham Ben Zion Abba
Shaul zt"l, *Ohr L'Tzion Zichron Hadassah*
pg.130

A BLANKET STATEMENT

When I* was in Israel, I went to Mea Shearim. Along with a group of businessmen I was with, I had the opportunity to have an audience with Rabbi Noson Tzvi Finkel. I had never heard of him and didn't know anything about him. We went into his study and waited 10 to 15 minutes for him. Finally, the doors opened.

What we did not know was that Rabbi Finkel was severely afflicted with Parkinson's disease. He sat down at the head of the table, and, naturally, our inclination was to look away.

We were all looking away, and we heard this big bang on the table: "Gentlemen, look at me, and look at me right now." Now his speech affliction was worse than his physical shaking. It was really hard to listen to him and watch him. He said, "I have only a few minutes for you because I know you're all busy American businessmen."

Then he asked, "Who can tell me what the lesson of the Holocaust is?" He called on one guy, who didn't know what to do — it was like being called on in the fifth grade without the answer. And the guy says something benign like, "We will never, ever forget?" And the rabbi completely dismisses him. I felt terrible for the guy until I realized the rabbi was getting ready to call on someone else. All of us were sort of under the table, looking away — you know, please, not me. He did not call me. I was sweating. He called on another guy, who had such a fantastic answer: "We will never, ever again be a victim or bystander."

The rabbi said, "You guys just don't get it. Okay, gentlemen, let me tell you the essence of the human spirit.

"As you know, during the Holocaust, the people were transported in the worst possible, inhumane way by railcar.

"After hours and hours in this inhumane corral with no light, no bathroom, cold, they arrived at the camps. The doors were swung wide open, and they were blinded by the light. After the terrible ordeal of being processed, they went off to the bunkers to sleep.

"As they went into the area to sleep, only one person was given a blanket for every six. The person who received the blanket, when he went to bed, had to decide, 'Am I going to push the blanket to the five other people who did not get one, or am I going to pull it toward myself to stay warm?'"

And Rabbi Finkel says, "It was during this defining moment that we learned the power of the human spirit, because we pushed the blanket to five others."

And with that, he stood up and said, "Take your blanket. Take it back to America and push it to five other people."

**Written by Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, adapted from Aish.com*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Sharing in the burden of a friend is one of the ways through which one acquires knowledge of Torah.¹
- *Moshe Rabbeinu* was 80 years old when he took *Klal Yisrael* out of Egypt. The Torah tells us little of those years, but everything that is told revolves around the idea of sharing in the burden of a friend.²

¹ Avos 6:6

² *Ohr R' Simcha Zissel, Shemos*, Essay 190