

PARASHAS VAYEIRA

Scattered Apples

Some days the thought of facing the world is just too overwhelming. You are under the weather. The car doesn't start. The furnace has broken down. A stack of unopened mail sits on your desk. You have a thousand things to do, and you don't even know where to begin. So what do you do? Do you deal with it? Or do you write the day off and try to get off to a better start tomorrow?

A quick look into this week's Torah reading offers enlightenment. As the portion begins, we find Abraham in a decidedly uncomfortable situation. It is a brutally hot day, and not a soul dares venture outdoors. Abraham, accustomed to a house full of guests, sits alone. He is sick and in terrible pain, having circumcised himself just a few days earlier at the ripe old age of one hundred. Hashem Himself pays him a sick call to inquire about his condition. As he sits in the presence of Hashem, Abraham suddenly notices three dusty travelers coming down the road. He quickly excuses himself and literally runs off to greet the travelers and welcome them into his home.

Truly amazing! Granted that Abraham loved to be hospitable, but there are limits, aren't there? Considering his advanced aged and the condition of his health, he surely could have excused himself from his hospitable activities for one day. And why did he have to run? Wouldn't it have been more prudent to walk at a more moderate pace? Furthermore, the Sages tell us that Abraham was taken to task for sending his son Ishmael to fetch the bread rather than get it himself. Was it really improper for him to share some of the burden, especially under these circumstances?

Let us consider for a moment an inner conflict that each of us encounters. On the one hand, we are energized to make use of every moment, to perform, to create, to accomplish. On the other hand, we are prone to a certain inertia, a lassitude that inclines us to relax, to procrastinate, to take the easy way out.

Why do we experience this ambivalence? Because we are ambivalent by our very nature, a peculiar hybrid of the material body and the spiritual soul. The soul is like a soaring bird, adventurous, exhilarated, tireless, always looking for new horizons. But the body to which it is attached is of an entirely different breed. It is like a piece of clay which would lie inert were it not constantly stimulated by the soul. This then is the anomaly of our existence. The soul wants us to

accumulate as much merit as possible to last us for all eternity. The body wants to relax.

When Abraham was in the presence of the Creator he was so inspired and energized that his soul achieved total domination of his body, and nothing was too difficult for him to do. No matter how much physical pain he felt, nothing could keep him from responding to the appearance of potential guests with the fullest vigor and verve to which he was accustomed.

A young boy was sent by his father to sell apples in the marketplace. He set up his table in the stall and spread out his apples for all the prospective customers to see.

Suddenly, a carriage came careening around the corner. Its wheel caught the edge of the boy's table and sent it flying, scattering apples all over the street. The boy watched in consternation as the people in the street snatched up the apples.

Deeply dejected, he went home empty-handed and told his father what had happened.

"So you didn't get any money," said the father. "I understand. But how about the apples?"

"Bit I told you what happened," the boy protested. "The apples were scattered all over the street, and the people snatched them up."

"True, true. But tell me, my dear son, why weren't you there together with them, snatching back as many of our apples as you could."

In our own lives, we always encounter numerous distractions, and the way we respond usually depends on the level of our spirituality. If we allow our material side to be predominant, we tend to indulge and inertia while we, of course, assure ourselves that we need some time off to get it all together again. But if we are truly spiritual, we will always be galvanized, undaunted by the obstacles that appear in our way as we strive to invest every living moment with value that will last us forever.