

name of that place (the one that could only be seen from a distance) God Will See, as they say today: ‘In the mountain of God Will Be Seen.’”

‘The place you see from here, you [certainly do] see from there,’ but only if you are not split by selfish personal interests, if you have not lost your perfect vision so that you can see nothing but yourself, no matter where you stand.

From God’s mountain, from the view from on high, one sees. One who is perfect, is privileged to see the perfect view, the Godly view that is free of contradictions and clean of conflicts.

being no more than a dream; it clashes with the reality of facts, which cannot easily renounce its own interests, its practical plans for present and future.

Avraham rises above them all, taking the view from above, which dwarfs all the tracks together, making of them a sort of clay, weaving them all into one, like “the three-ply thread that will not be easily severed,” and will not be easily seduced by the whispers coming from all sides.

“God will see to his lamb for an offering, my son,” An incredible weaving of the lamb and the son into the Godly crown. The dimension of height does not hover somewhere up there, high in the heavenly void: Avraham builds an altar, setting the stage for the building of the Holy Temple, whose dome rests securely on the earth’s three staunch supports, built by man, by his intelligence, his humanness, and his faith, making out of these three one solid block bearing heaven and earth upon its shoulders in their perfect unity. Avraham rises and ascends higher than himself, and higher than the angels.

The wonder and the miracle that Avraham worked, proved to all the dwellers of the earth that man is not required to leave his own human essence behind in order to strive to the highest heights of spiritual quality. Without his only son, Avraham would never have been able to attain his lofty height. And it is not as though the son served merely as the means, as the too in the service of his great father. Rather, a fully equal partner in the effort to make the sacrifice, and fully equal in the rights that accrued from that act, Yitzchak was an *olah temimah*, a whole and perfect offering, whom the angels washed with their tears, a loving husband, and a compassionate father who never despaired of the hope of bringing something precious out of something low-grade, even with his son Esav. A Godly human being who carved out his own place: The place that could only be “seen from a distance,” at the beginning of the journey, becomes the place of the perfect person. “And Avraham called the

“Let it not be evil in your eyes, about the youth, and about your maidservant. Everything Sarah tells you, obey her,” God hands down the verdict to Avraham.

In the harmony of pairedness lies the secret of unity. There is no injustice here, being perpetrated by distancing a mother and child. The Creator presents Avraham with a novel idea: A faithful wife’s opinion is the secret of unity, as mentioned, in that it is the conduit for messages sent from heaven to her husband. “For she is a prophetess,” Hazal add, meaning, a man’s wife is a prophetess in relation to him. It is through her that he receives messages and guidelines from heaven. Yet this alone is not enough. After all, antagonism prevails within man himself, and contradiction runs riot; it does not occur only in the person-to-person realm.

*Akeidat Yitzchak: The Ultimate Achievement*

Avraham demonstrates an ability to control all the human paths in creation. This control encompasses all the human relationships within reality, including all of its contradictory tracks: The track of rationality, controlled by the mind; the track of faith, controlled by emotion; and the track of facts belonging to tangible reality. Upon Avraham is decreed the task of confronting all tracks at once, including each one’s different character, running along its own track – tracks that are never meant to meet, yet that meet nevertheless within human reality. Over this human reality, Avraham – history’s greatest believer – is appointed.

“Pray, take your son, your only one, Yitzchak, and raise him up as an offering...” This track of faith will create a storm so powerful as to shake the foundations of the universe. Powerful emotion, bound by its umbilical cord to the beloved son, to the only one, to the realization of hope – clashes mightily forward and back; it clashes with the rational mind, which dismisses the track of faith as

fear of God in this place.” For if there is no fear of God, then a contradiction exists between the conflicting interests that prevail among people. Those who lack fear of God never attempt to look upon these contradictions and conflicts from a perspective of unity. Rather each one turns to his own coveted gain, while ignoring the contradiction, the injustice, the lie, etc.

“So it happened that when God misled me...” meaning, when it was decreed upon me from Heaven to enter into the thick of existential and Godly contradiction, and I was charged with the duty of unifying it, I was compelled to make do with a unity of outlook only, and to momentarily accept reality’s contradiction, and to renounce the goal of actual unity, of actually bridging the contradiction inherent in a survival-oriented reality.

Now the great moment arrives and the miracle occurs: Yitzchak’s birth becomes a real existing fact, in spite of all the contradictions, and along with all the contradictions. Here is a double contradiction, both on the plane of theory, and along the route of reality as well. Yitzchak (“he will laugh”) is so called after the laughter of surprise, and wonder over the unpredictable possibilities for uniting heaven and earth. Surprise at the astonishing sight of heaven’s control of earth. A perfect actualization of the track of faith, has taken place specifically through the track of tangible reality. A laughter of immense relief enters the universe: Absurdity had been eliminated; faith in unity is now celebrating its victory.

Nevertheless, the essential is still lacking: Human unity, unity among human beings. The inevitable conflicts between people. “Just as their faces are different, so are their views different.” Avraham attempts to ignore this decree of antagonism within the creation. “Chase out this maidservant and her son,” Sarah demands. Conflicts over inheritance, conflicts over money, along with conflicts over faith. Yishmael could ruin Yitzchak’s innocent faith with the idolatrous games he plays.

the heaven. As though the monotheistic principle of unity had no real hold on reality, God forbid.

### The Contradiction Within the Inner Human Self

There is no man in the land,” Lot’s daughters explain. Meaning, despite our staunch faith in the monotheistic management of the universe, the inner human self is incapable of escaping the contradictions rioting within itself, during moments of distress mainly, or during any moment that deviates from the routine.

But he is all lies,” claimed Truth, when asked for her opinion as to whether man should be created. He is filled with lies in the sense that he is filled with contradictions by his very nature. The very fact of combining spirit and matter, mind and emotion, individual and society, must necessarily must create an antagonism and a contradiction from which there is no escape, for anyone who would prefer not to lose contact with his own existence, even just to survive physically, and especially if his head would rise to the heights of heaven.

For the sake of survival, versus “for the sake of Heaven”: This duality creates an incessant friction, which could ruin the proper procedures of reality. The believer is charged with the mission of placing the “to what purpose”, the value-based meaning, the “for the sake of heaven” in the central arena, after having cleared it of the survival mechanism’s goal of “how”, which usually commands center stage in a person’s life. One must substitute “for what purpose” and “for the sake of heaven” for “how”.

Indeed it does seem that this was the intention of Lot’s daughters, for their intention was to repair the universe. “Because the women’s intentions were acceptable [to God].” (Sforno) “And they were modest,” the Ramban determines. So too in the case of Avimelech: Avraham knew how to unite the contradiction that had been created in reality between his wife’s beauty and the fact that “there is no

gives His attention to the individual to know him personally, to have His protection attached to him constantly, so that [God's'] knowledge and remembering never separate from him at any time..." (Ramban)

This means that taking the high view, relating directly to Him, *yitbarach*, through the initiative of free choice on the part of the *tsadik*, wins one a direct, personalized Providence, which bestows an order, stability, and consistency that straightens the bumps and eliminates the antagonism and absurdity of existence that are visible on the surface of things – to the eyes of men of little faith – but which a perfect believer like Avraham is spared.

Will You even destroy the righteous with the wicked?" How, Avraham asks vehemently, can You possibly permit such a dangerous contradiction to be made visible? Even though it is no contradiction in my eyes, for after all I am well aware of the fact that there are no righteous in Sodom. Yet what will human beings say? After all, that a *tsadik* is neighbor to a *rasha* is a necessity of existence, for the benefit of both, but one must take care that the lot of the wicked will not befall the righteous.

### The Overturning of Sedom and Amora

In an extreme case of utter and absolute contradiction between the two tracks of theory and practice, such contradiction cannot be allowed to continue, in that it constitutes an antithesis, contradicting the very validity of faith, implying – "God has abandoned the land". After all, random chance does not obligate the theory of Godly management of the universe. There cannot seem to be a management of earth that is different than the management of heaven. When this appears to be the case, the management that is running amok on earth cannot be permitted to continue.

To believe that such a possibility exists – of a separate management of heaven and earth – is to come to harm, as did Lot's wife. She looked behind her, meaning that she believed there did indeed exist a god of the earth, as opposed to the God of

to “I have grown old” meaning: How can it be that Sarah has difficulty accepting the absurdity inherent in logical principal? After all, the approach of believing in one God is meant to unite the creation, and this unity is capable of eliminating the phenomenon of antagonism and absurdity. The believer is required to hold onto the principle of unity as a substitute for the antagonism inherent in creation.

And Sarah denied, saying: ‘I did not laugh,’ for she was in awe.” It was a laughter of surprise that Sarah laughed, rather than a laugh of derision – surprise at the encounter with absurdity. “For she was in awe.” Her awe had prepared her for accepting the absurdity inherent in reality with relative ease, because her faith and awe had taught her that everything is from God. “Is anything impossible for God?” Not that this perfect faith in the Creator’s omnipotence eliminates the absurdity inherent in logic. On the contrary: Despite the impossibility on the plane of logic, it is in God’s hands to turn absurdity into reality.

“And he said: ‘No, for you did laugh.’” Meaning, not only on the practical track, but even on the logical track, the obligation of faith applies. “And God blamed her to Avraham, as to why the thing was not feasible in her eyes, for it would have been appropriate for her to believe, or to have said: ‘Amen, may it be God’s will.’” (Ramban)

‘Because I have known him, because he will command his children...and they will keep the path of God, to do charity and justice.’ And what is correct in my eyes is that this is a real and tangible knowledge of him. It is hinting that God’s knowledge, which is His Providence over this lowly world, is to keep the rules, and even if human beings find themselves governed by random chance, until the time comes that they must given an accounting, [meaning, even though there is a logical consistency to faith, in theory, nevetheless in practice the individual is given over to the rule of random chance in his daily life, i.e. there is consistency on the theoretical track but absurdity on the practical track of reality] but in His abundant kindness, he

contradictory responses, creating a wildly chaotic state. It is at this point that a man loses control over himself, and can be drawn into the eye of the storm.

The *mida* of trust in God grants the staunch believer a solid posture that does not collapse under the pressure of pandemonium and confusion. He is dealing instead with the track that runs on high, that bestows of its solid and bright spirit, that sheds a bright and clear light that has no shadows.

The dimension of height grants a meaning that bestows a staunchly law-governed character upon the confusion of existence per se`. The role of the *yetsar* is to push apart and to drive a wedge between the two tracks, to confuse one track with another, to focus on the contradictions and to emphasize the antagonism created by the tendency to seek logic on the track of existence, and the heart's tendency to seek a personal point of encounter, an emotional involvement in every point along the track of unfolding events. To have everything and to feel you have nothing becomes an impossible mission, as does having nothing and feeling you have everything. Here the *yetsar* makes its appearance, to harass the one who believes in the truth of the structure he has created, in which he trusts confidently, though he has nothing. The *yetsar* accuses him of lacking a serious attitude, of being light-minded, of ignoring his obligations toward his relatives who are dependent upon him, of showing a lack of responsibility towards them. To the one who has everything, and yet feels as though he has nothing at all, the *yetsar* sends its arrows of mockery, while a pack of clowns clamors its chorus of mirth.

“Whoever hears – will laugh for me.” Is Sarah succumbing and denying? Not necessarily: Perhaps it is a case of having nothing and feeling one has everything: “After I have withered, I will have youthful freshness?” Having nothing is one contradiction, and also “my lord is old” as well. We have here a double absurdity, both from the logical perspective and from the realistic perspective. The greatest among the angels wonders at Sarah’s response, but changes “my lord is old”

one who – having everything, feels he has nothing, and having nothing, is as confident in God as if he had everything.

There is no doubt that such a demand for such a perfect bitahon means a demand that human beings hold on to both ends of two absolutely opposite extremes. Such a demand is opposed to human nature, for human beings tend to rely on logical ways of thinking, and to refuse to recognize states of absurdity, and conditions overflowing with contradictions.

### Traveling Two Opposite Routes

#### A Double Absurdity: Existentialism and Faith

Practically speaking, one travels two routes: The route of actual existence – a route paved with rules and laws that appear to be ordered according to a fixed, brute force-based logic, and the human, subjective route, which is constantly being re-created anew by one's own human/emotional/personal relating, that flows in circles that change without end, and that have little connection to logic. Here the place of logic is usurped by emotions and values – dim sensations influenced by the depths of the past, whose emissaries travel the vast distances from the past, toward the dim reaches of the future, both near and distant. This route is intertwined with, and constantly encountering the route of reality, at every point in space and time. It ruins the linear thread of logic that makes every effort to grasp onto it; at times it is successful, and at other times it despairs, and lets go its grasp, when distress grows greater, and overwhelms routine. It can happen that events take a sudden sharp turn that surprises the linear thread of logic, disconcerting it completely. The opening then created by the ruin of logic gets quickly filled by heart's desires, and other

Whereas the Jews of Poland – persecuted and dragged about in their efforts to earn a livelihood, by anti-Semitic Gentiles who dogged and hindered their every step – would sustain themselves by “luftgesheft”, business deals built in the air. They would raise their eyes to the One above, Who sits on high, and pray that He might not hide His face from them, because down here on earth, there was nothing to hope for.

Here the child asks: Which has the greater trust in God? Someone who has everything, yet believes that the Holy One has the power to ruin his procedures, no matter how thoroughly planned, or someone who has nothing, and must place all his trust in God alone.

On the one hand, the latter does not seem to require a fundamental trust in God, for after all, does he have a choice? What else can he do but trust in God? Whereas someone whose situation is successful, and is absorbed in managing his well-ordered lifestyle, and nevertheless succeeds in holding on to his tranquility and faith in God – who could be a greater *ba'al bitabon* than he?

In fact one might say that someone who has everything, and has no need whatsoever for relying on the *mida* of trust in God – for after all, he can trust in “[his] strength and the might of [his] hand” – and yet he still does not forget that it is in the power of the omnipotent One to ruin everything he has, such trust relies on pure free choice, and is preferable to the trust of the one who has nothing.

Nevertheless, it appears that the *mida* of trust and confidence in God is somewhat lacking in both of them. Neither has a pure faith, neither is clean of all incursions of personal interests from the existential realm.

He who has nothing, trusts from lack of choice. He who has everything, trusts, but not exclusively in God. A perfect *ba'al bitabon*, one of perfect trust in God, is

## Parashat VaYera

### Not Having – and Feeling That You Have

#### And the Contrary:

### Having – and Feeling That You Do Not Have

Hasidim interpret the differences in the *nusab* of the Kel Erech Apayim prayer when opening the Ark, as Hasidim will – with a parable. The Polish *nusab* reads: “Do not hide Your face from me.” The German *nusab* reads: “Do not, with Your Wrath, rebuke me.” (Or “with Your nose:” The Hebrew word for wrath is *ahf*, which literally means nose.)

The German Jews, whose finances flowed along peaceful waters, and followed orderly rules of economic theory, took a methodical approach to business opportunities. They would advise with their bank manager, with their accountant, and with their financial adviser. Then a population of experts would investigate cash flow conditions and conduct feasibility studies, to determine the profitability of the venture, and then they would arrive at a decision.

What would be left for the German Jew – walking confidently through his worldly affairs – to request of the Creator of the universe? “Do not, with your wrath/nose, rebuke me.” As a believer, born of believers, I know full well that in spite of all my cleverness and meticulous efforts, You have the power to ruin my plans, now matter how cautious and well-laid they have been. Therefore I lay my prayer before You, Master of the universe, that You shall not stick Your nose into my affairs.