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## **Vayera: Sustained Commitment**

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

(Adapted from drasha given on Shabbos Parshas Lech Lecha 5777)

Avraham's journey was not an easy one. This week's Parsha opens with our Patriarch sitting at the entrance of his tent, just a few days after circumcision (at the age of 99) eagerly looking for guests who he can host. A little while later, Avraham and Sarah are blessed with the birth of Yitzchak and for a brief moment it appears that our Patriarch and Matriarch will finally have the ability to enjoy their blessings and reap the beautiful bounty they have sown. But it was not to be. Yishmael causes familial problems and Avraham has no choice but to listen to Sarah and expel him from their home. God then commands Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak and although Avraham passes this awesome test, he loses his beloved Sarah (we will discuss this more in next week's Parsha). To be honest, it just doesn't seem "fair." In last week's Parsha God said to Avraham:

*"And the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will aggrandize your name, and [you shall] be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-2)."*

When we read this Divine promise, we hear God telling Avraham, "If you listen to me all will be beautiful and wonderful." Yet, from the beginning, the story of Avraham and Sarah's lives is filled with difficulty, adversity and turbulence. From the moment Avraham and Sarah arrive in Canaan, they must contend with famine, childlessness, kidnapping, war, familial strife and a host of other challenges and difficulties. How can we reconcile the disparity between the promises of God to Avraham and the actual life events of Avraham?

There is an amazing Gemara in Tractate Succah 31a:

ההיא סבתא דאתאי לקמיה דרב נחמן, אמרה ליה: ריש גלותא וכולהו רבנן דבי ריש גלותא בסוכה גזולה הוו יתבי צווחה ולא אשגח בה רב נחמן. אמרה ליה: איתתא דהוה ליה לאבוהא תלת מאה ותמני סרי עבדי צווחא קמייכו ולא אשגחיתו בה?

*There was an elderly woman who came before Rav Nachman and said to him: The Reish Galusa (head of the Jewish community in Babylonia) and all of the Rabbis associated with him are sitting in a stolen Succah (apparently the woman claimed the rabbis had stolen her wood to build their Succah). Rav Nachman didn't pay attention to her claim (thinking that it was without merit). She said to him, "A woman whose father had 318 servants (soldiers) comes before you and cries out and you are going to ignore her?"*

The great Chassidic master, Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (1823-1900) explains that the greatness of Avraham was not simply his unwavering obedience and commitment to God. Avraham's greatness was in his ability to never give up. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov used to say, "Eyn Yeyush BaOlam Klal, there is no despair (giving up) in this world at all." If a person wants to succeed at something in life he needs to tell himself that there is only one possible outcome – success. Avraham Avinu was dedicated to a destiny and he would allow nothing to derail him. When Lot was captured – Avraham decided he had to save his nephew. He only had 318 soldiers against the combined forces of four different kingdoms – an illogical decision. It was the only decision – Avraham knew what had to be done and there was only one way – forward. Avraham never gave up, he never despaired, he approached every situation with the confidence he would succeed.

This is what the elderly woman was communicating to Rav Nachman. "Do you think I am going away? Do you think I am going to let this go? Do you know who I am? I am the daughter of Avraham Avinu; I am the daughter of the man who went to war against four kingdoms with just a handful of soldiers – why? Because it had to be done. I am here to reclaim that which is mine and I will not yield until justice is done."

It is with this insight that we can begin to understand the Divine choreography of Avraham's life. Avraham's entire life was to teach us this lesson - *Eyn Yeyush BaOlam, you cannot give up and you cannot give in. When there is something you must accomplish, you must figure out a way to get it done.* Therefore, his entire life was a series of



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difficulties - each one that could have easily derailed a lesser couple. But when you believe in yourself - when you believe in your ability to succeed - you can accomplish anything.

We have just finished a turbulent and unsettling election season. There are many lessons to be learned as individuals and as a nation. But there is one thing that I found truly striking. On the night of the election, Secretary Clinton's camp was at the Javits Center and President-elect Trump's camp was at the Hilton (both in Manhattan, NY about two miles from each other). Both locations were gearing up for a magnificent celebration, both candidates had written victory speeches and neither candidate wrote a concession speech. What an important lesson - you have to play to win. In order to accomplish something great in life, whether it is becoming the President of the United States or some other important life goal or milestone you have to give it your all, failure cannot be an option, you cannot leave an escape hatch through which you can run away when things get difficult. If you want to succeed in life – you must be ready to commit to seeing your endeavors and initiatives to fruition.

Too often in life we begin something important and meaningful with the words “*I’ll try hard*” or “*I will do my best.*” Those words, these phrases leave the option for failure on the table. If you want to accomplish in life – you must be willing to say, “*I will do whatever needs to be done to cross the finish line. No matter how difficult it may be – I will be successful.*” Whether it is working on my marriage, advancing my career or increasing my spirituality and religious commitment – it is not enough to try hard – we must be committed to success, committed to accomplishment, committed to crossing the finish line.

Life is filled with challenges and surprises and each of them give us the opportunity to test our resolve for our life goals and aspirations. May we merit to be like Avraham and Sarah.