



Vayera: Failure and Fortitude
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It was a time of great joy and celebration. Avraham and Sarah were told they would be blessed with a son and for the first time in many years the future looked bright and optimistic. But it was in that moment of jubilation that God felt compelled to share his plan for the destruction of Sodom and its surrounding cities with Avraham. *“Ha’Michaseh Ani Mey’Avraham? Can I hide what I am about to do from Avraham? He is the father of a multitude of nations; he is their leader and teacher. I must share my plans with him.”* And as Avraham hears of the imminent destruction, he begins to bargain. *“If there are fifty righteous men will you save the city?”* Avraham asks God. God agrees. When it became clear that there were not fifty righteous men to be found, Avraham keeps asking for the cities to be spared in the merit of a few number of *tzaddikim*. But to no avail; there were not even ten righteous men whose merit could save the cities. Avraham lost the battle. The angels march towards Sodom and destruction ensues.

The Torah states: *“And the Lord departed when He finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place (Bereishis 18:33).”* Why must the Torah tell us that *“Avraham returned to his place?”* What is the deeper meaning of this seemingly extraneous verse? Rashi comments: *“... and Abraham returned to his place: The Judge left, the defender left, and the prosecutor is accusing. Therefore: “And the two angels came to Sodom,” to destroy (Gen. Rabbah 49:14).”* Avraham has no more arguments to advance. No additional methods to advocate on behalf of the people for Sodom. The case is closed, the defender and prosecutor pack up and the enforcers leave to carry out the sentence.

Rav Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam (Shiniver Rov, 1813-1898) explains, *“even though Avraham was unable to save the people of Sodom through his prayer and God destroyed them with fire and sulphur, Avraham’s service of God was not diminished. He understood that all God does is just.... ‘He returned to his place’ - he returned to serving God with joy, commitment and love; just as he had done before.”*

Avraham suffered a significant set-back. Just a few verses earlier God had crowned him the father of a multitude of nations. He was to inspire and shape not just the future Jewish people but humanity as a whole. He was to educate the masses as a father does for his children. He was to love the nations as a parent loves his own flesh and blood. When Avraham supplicated and bargained on behalf of the people of Sodom - this was a father begging for mercy on his children. Every parent has one basic, core instinct - protect my child at all costs. But he failed. He could not convince God to spare the people. He couldn’t protect his children. We feel his pain. Avraham and God part company without uttering a word to one another. Sadness fills the air. Avraham broken that he couldn’t save his children, God saddened that He would have to punish his creations.

What does Avraham do after experiencing this set-back? *“V’Avraham Shav Limkomo, Avraham returned to his place”* - he returned back to the state he was in before. He would not lose himself in pain or self-pity. He would not lose himself in the pit of despair. He needed to move on. He needed to figure out what had to be done to prevent another catastrophic event like this from occurring. *How can I uplift humanity? How can I better the world?* He dusted himself off, dried his tears and resumed his relationship with God and the building of his spiritual self.

We all encounter defeat. There are moments when we feel we have failed and in doing so have let ourselves and others down. Some of these failures are real and some are perceived. But the pain is often palpable. We learn from our first Patriarch, to dust ourselves off and find the courage and strength to pick up where we left off. When we suffer defeat - we must be *shav limkomeynu, return to our place*, resume our holy work and continue down the path of life accomplishment.