

PARSHA GAMES

The Chessed Obstacle Course

by Sammy Schaechter

GOAL: For the kids to learn about how Avraham would not only always do chessed, but he would do it as fast as he could, even when it may have been difficult for him.

TYPE: Moderate, indoor, group game

PREPARE IN ADVANCE:

HOW TO PLAY: Split the kids up into two teams (you can do it as one group as well if there aren't enough kids). The point of the game is to do as much chessed as possible. If there are two teams they will compete against each other, if you do it as one group then time the kids in order that they go as fast as possible.

There will be four different stations representing four different kinds of chessed...

1. Tzedakah- They must throw "coins" into the "tzedakah box". Be creative with this, have them throw some sort of a fake coin (or something similar) into a box.
2. Cleaning the park- Put out a bunch of different things on the floor and have the kids clean them all up and put them into a bucket/"trash can".
3. Visiting the sick- Put a blanket over a group leader and give them three high fives.
4. Hachnasat Orchim- Set a place setting at a table (plate, cup, napkin, spoon, and fork) Each kid will get a chance

to go through the obstacle course. They will finish all of them as quickly as they can and then come back and tag the next person in line. Make sure to "reset" each station before each person takes their turn (aka put the "garbage" back on the floor, give them "coins", take the blanket off of the group leader, and clear off the table). If you can think of any other chessed stations, add them to the list!

DISCUSSION: In this week's Parsha, we learn about Avraham and his never ending dedication and commitment to always doing chessed. Avraham was sitting recuperating from his brit milah surgery when he gets a special visit from Hashem. Then in the middle of talking to Hashem, three "people" (who are really angels) come walking by. Avraham jumps up to greet them and he and Sarah welcome them into their home with open arms. Even though Avraham wasn't feeling well and it was probably difficult for him to run around taking care of his guests, he still worked as fast and as hard as he could to take care of his guests. Just like we did in our obstacle course, we learn from Avraham how important it is to do chessed and help other people even if it may sometimes be difficult for us. Just like we'd like people to help us when we need it, we should always try to help people in their times of need as well.

TEFILAH TREASURES

Birkat Kriat Shema, Part 2

In one of the brachot before Shema, it says that "Hashem's kindness lasts forever". This means that Hashem takes care of everyone and everything in the world with a constant and unlimited flow of chessed. Every single day Hashem refreshes the world and all of His creations. Each moment that the world continues to exist is a moment of chessed from Hashem. If even a half of a second went by

without Hashem caring about the world and all of us in it, we wouldn't last past that half a second. We should always try to believe that Hashem helps us every second of our day and without His help we would never be able to succeed in our daily lives. We must thank Hashem every day for everything He does for us because without Him we wouldn't even be here. Thanks Hashem! You're the greatest!



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PARSHAT VAYEIRA

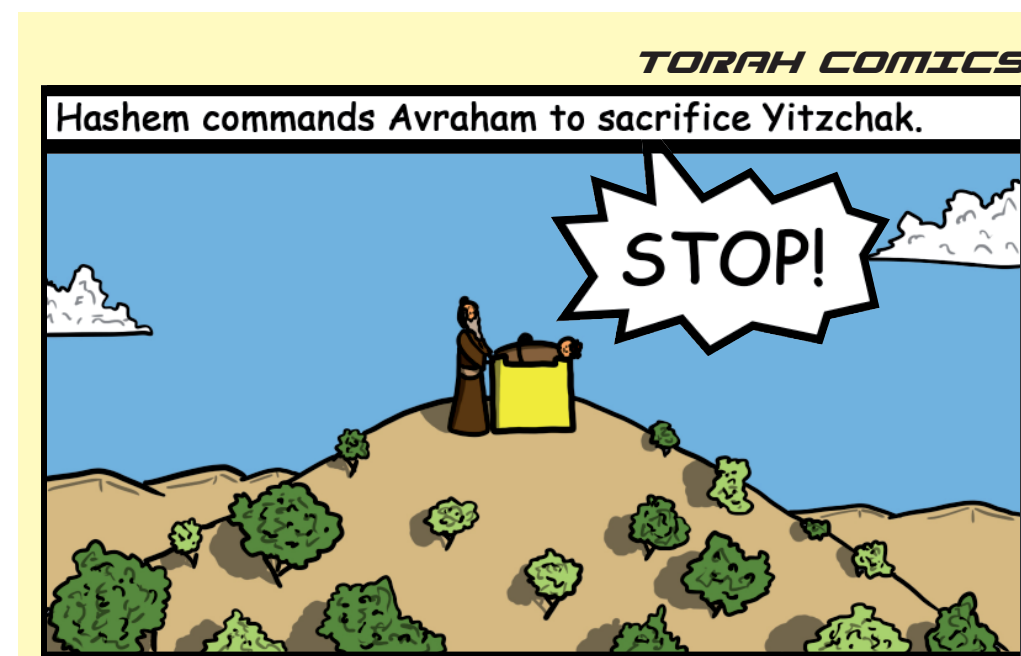
Vayeira Wrap-Up

by Sammy Schaechter

Hashem came to visit Avraham as he was sitting at the entrance of his tent. Avraham saw three "people" traveling past his tent and ran to invite them into his home. These "people", who were actually angels in human disguise, gladly took him up on the invitation, and Avraham and Sarah prepared a beautiful feast for them. The angels told Avraham that Sarah was going to give birth to a child in exactly one year from then. Sarah heard this news and laughed. The angels left from there and continued on to Sodom, where Lot lived, to destroy the five cities in that area. Hashem told Avraham He was going to destroy Sodom because of all the evil people that were there. Avraham tried to save them by trying to find fifty righteous

people there. When it was clear that that wasn't going to happen, Avraham "bargained" with Hashem – eventually asking Him to spare Sodom even if there are only ten righteous individuals there, but Avraham couldn't even

turned into a pillar of salt. Sarah gave birth to a son named Yitzchak at the age of ninety. Avraham gave Yitachak a brit milah when he was eight days old. Sarah saw that Yishmael, Yitachak's older half-brother, was a bad influence



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find ten. The angels came to Sodom, and Lot invited them to his home to eat and rest. The evil people of Sodom heard that Lot was having guests and wanted to come attack them. Lot refused to allow that to happen and the angels made everyone surrounding the house blind. The angels told Lot about what was going to happen, and told him to leave Sodom. Lot, his wife, and two of his daughters left the city and were warned not to look back as the city was being destroyed. Lot's wife looked back though and was

on him. She told Avraham to kick Yishmael and his mother Hagar out of the house. Hashem told Avraham to take Yitachak and offer him as a sacrifice on a mountain. Avraham took Yitachak and together headed for the mountain. They got there and Avraham built the altar and tied up Yitachak. Just as Avraham stretched out his hand to take the slaughtering knife, an angel ordered him to stop and instead Avraham offered a ram. Hashem promised Avraham great blessings as a reward for passing this difficult test.

The Difference

And he saw and lo! there were three men standing by him. And he saw and he ran towards them (18:2)

R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov, once visited Lvov incognito. He first went to one of the wealthy men of the community, a man who held a prominent position in the city.

R' Levi Yitzchak was dressed simply and looked like a poor man. He was told to wait until the master finished some business and had time to speak to him. Finally, after a long wait, the visitor was ushered into the rich man's presence.

"Might I stay here just until tomorrow?" he asked. "What?!" the man shouted angrily. "Is that what you came here to ask? What do you think this is, a hotel, an open house? Sorry. Go find a different fool who will let you lounge around in his house."

R' Levi Yitzchak did not reply. He left the house and went to the poor melamed to ask for a night's lodging. The latter, who lived in a two room cottage with his large family, did not hesitate, but gladly welcomed the traveler without knowing who he was.

Later that day, when R' Levi Yitzchak

went outside, he happened to meet an acquaintance. The latter was surprised to see the great man, but overjoyed that he had decided to grace their city with his presence. Soon he had broadcast the news of R' Levi Yitzchak's arrival all over town and people came flocking to the poor melamed's home to pay their respects. Among the arrivals was the rich man who had previously refused to have R' Levi Yitzchak in his home. He had come to ask the Rebbe's forgiveness for his rude behavior.

"I didn't know who you were. But now that I know that you are the great R' Levi Yitzchak, I beg of you, please come and be my guest. All visiting rabbis are my guests. I have the best accommodations!"

This was not at all the kind of apology that R' Levi Yitzchak wanted. He cared nothing about his own honor but he did resent the rich man's attitude towards hospitality. One did not only offer hospitality to famous people; it should be offered to everyone. And so R' Levi Yitzchak turned to the large crowd of people present and said, "Do you know the difference between Avraham Avinu and Lot, his nephew?

Did they not both practice hospitality? Lot also prepared a fine meal, and baked matzos for his guests."

The audience looked expectantly and waited for the answer.

R' Levi Yitzchak continued, "By Lot it is written, 'And the angels arrived in Sodom' whereas by Avraham it is written, 'And he saw and lo, three men were standing...' Lot did not see strange men, he saw angels. Who would not welcome angels into his house?! But Avraham only saw men, dusty travelers, hungry and thirsty wanderers, common Arabs. Nevertheless, he still rushed forward to welcome them into his home.

Our Sages say: 'Perhaps you think that the travelers appeared to Avraham as angels?' The answer is no; they looked like common Arabs. Yet, he greeted them warmly. Thus we, the descendants of Avraham, should follow this example and greet people with eager hospitality. I was given this kind of a warm welcome at the home of this humble but pious melamed. Is there any reason for me to change my lodgings?"

TALES OF TZADIKIM

A Simple Jew

And he saw and lo! there were three men standing by him. And he saw and he ran towards them (18:2)

Shmelke, famous and celebrated throughout Europe, did not enjoy the attention that went with his reputation. He was humble and, thinking himself to be no better than his fellow man, did not want to be treated differently. Thus, when R' Shmelke left Selish to accept the rabbinical position in Balkan, in order to avoid the grand reception that he knew the townspeople were

preparing for him, he came a day early.

R' Shmelke checked in at a local hotel without giving his name. The innkeeper saw a simple man before him and treated him casually, even disparagingly. R' Shmelke did not say a word.

That Shabbos, when everyone gathered in the synagogue to hear the new rabbi deliver his sermon, the innkeeper suddenly recognized his guest and was shocked. How he had mistreated him! How shamefully he had behaved! As soon as the sermon

was over he rushed to the rabbi to beg his forgiveness.

"I had no idea who you were! Had I known, I would certainly have treated you differently."

"Oh really? I thought that you did know that I was the new rabbi. After all, I am really no one special. But if you did not know who I was and treated me shamefully, thinking me a common Jew, you still did wrong. Why did you not treat me better? Does a simple Jew not deserve decent treatment?"

HaRav Nosson Tzvi Finkel

March 12, 1943 - November 8, 2011

HaRav Nosson Tzvi Finkel was an American-born rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem, Israel. He grew up in Chicago and even played on the baseball and basketball teams in high school. During his time there from 1990 until his death in 2011, he built the Mir into the largest yeshiva in Israel with nearly 7,600 students.

According to one estimate, he taught 25,000 students over his lifetime. Although he suffered from Parkinson's disease for the last 28 years of his life, which made him shake uncontrollably and slurred his speech, he did not let his illness stop him from learning Torah for long hours, giving regular shiurim, and fundraising for his yeshiva around the world. He didn't want to take medicine for his illness because it

would make him lose his memory and he didn't want to forget all the Torah he learned. He raised about \$500 million for the Mir during his time as Rosh Yeshiva. He was known for his Torah erudition and his warmth and concern for his students. There were about 100,000 people at his funeral. After he passed away, his son Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Finkel took over as Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir.

PUZZLERS ANSWERS

TEST YOUR PARSHA KNOWLEDGE

1. Because he was sick and recovering from doing Bris Milah
2. 3
3. To tell Avraham and Sarah they were going to have a son, to heal Avraham, and that they were going to destroy Sodom
4. She laughed because she was really old
5. Because the people there were very evil
6. He looked for tzadikim there but couldn't find any
7. A pillar of salt
8. Sacrifice him
9. An angel came and told him not to
10. He sacrificed a ram
11. Avraham was 100 and Sarah was 90
12. He stopped at ten because when the flood happened Hashem destroyed the world even though there were 8 tzadikim.
13. Since they really deserved to be destroyed with them
14. Because he was a bad influence on Yitzchak
15. Har HaMoriah
16. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
17. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
18. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
19. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
20. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of mitzvot.
21. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
22. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
23. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the

- destruction of Sodom.
24. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
25. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
26. 19:3 - It was Passover.
27. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
28. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
29. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
30. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
31. Yishmael & Eliezer
32. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
33. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
34. 19:1 - He was a judge.

PARSHA CODE

1. AVRAHAM was SITING by the DOOR of his TENT WAITING for GUESTS
2. 3 MALACHIM DRESSED like PEOPLE came to VISIT AVRAHAM, who was recovering from his BRIS
3. AVRAHAM RAN to SERVE his GUESTS he GAVE them MILK, and TONGUE with MUS-TARD
4. When they ASKED AVRAHAM where his WIFE was, he said she was in the TENT
5. They TOLD him that in 1 YEAR, SARAH will have a BABY BOY
6. When SARAH HEARD that she would GIVE BIRTH, she LAUGHED
7. 1 MALACH told AVRAHAM that the CITY of SODOM will be DESTROYED
8. AVRAHAM DAVENED that SODOM should not be DESTROYED if there was enough TZADIKIM in the CITY
9. LOT was SAVED along with his WIFE and 2 DAUGHTERS, but his WIFE became SALT when she LOOKED BACK
10. SARAH wanted to SEND YISHMAEL AWAY, so that YITZCHAK won't be affected by him. HASHEM told AVRAHAM to LISTEN to SARAH
11. HAGAR DAVENED that YISHMAEL shouldn't DIE of THIRST, and a MIRACLE happened
12. HASHEM COMMANDED AVRAHAM to BRING YITZCHAK as a KORBAN
13. When YITZCHAK realized that he was the KORBAN, he WENT happily
14. a RAM was STUCK in the BUSH, and AVRAHAM used that as a KORBAN instead of YITZCHAK

TORAH RHYMES & RIDDLES

1. Avraham
2. Lot
3. Lot's wife
4. Avimelech
5. Yitzchak
6. Hagar
7. Ishmael

Humility

"I am but dust and ash." (Bereishis 18:27)

Over 200 years ago, R' Yehudah ben Attar, known to his fellow citizens by the term "Rabi Elkabir" ("The Great Rabbi"), served as Av Beis Din of the city of Fez.

One afternoon, after Minchah, R' Yehudah ben Attar stepped out of the beis midrash and began walking home to eat lunch and to take a short rest. On his way, he passed by the marketplace. The Jewish merchants rose to their feet and greeted him respectfully, while the Arabs, who knew him as a holy man, called out, "Greetings to you, Rabi Elkabir!" And R' Yehudah warmly returned all their greetings.

On one corner stood a coal merchant's shop. It was hard to even call it a "shop"; it was narrow, cramped, and dark, filled to the brim with sacks of coal. The merchant would move some of the sacks to the street each morning and, seated on a small wooden stool, call out to passersby to buy his wares.

Seeing R' Yehudah approaching, the coal merchant called, "Rabi, can you do me a favor?"

"What kind of question is that? A favor for a fellow Jew? Of course I'll do it!" R' Yehudah answered readily.

"I am very hungry, and it's hard for me to drag my sacks back into the shop. If you're willing to wait here with my coal, I'll run home, eat some lunch, and return immediately!"

The other merchants who overheard this request dropped their jaws in amazement. How dare that coal man belittle Rabi's honor in this way? But R' Yehudah was glad to do the mitzvah that had chanced to come his way. "All right, my son. Go on, and enjoy your meal!"

The coal merchant went home, and Rabi sat down at the shop's entrance reviewing the Talmud from memory. Presently, a friend of his came walking by. It was the dayan (judge), R' Yaakov.

"Rabi!" R' Yaakov cried out in surprise. "What is Rabi doing here?"

"The shopkeeper gave me the privilege of doing a mitzvah," R' Yehudah answered happily. "I'm looking after his store while he eats lunch."

R' Yaakov grew very angry. "How

dare that stupid coal merchant belittle our Rabi in this way!"

"Chas v'shalom!" R' Yehudah said. "He is not stupid, only naive. Because of him, I now understand the words of R' Yehudah Hanasi in Talmud Yerushalmi (Kesubos 12): 'Whatever a person asks of me — I will do it for him!'"

R' Yehudah ben Attar went on, "Had someone asked R' Yehudah Hanasi for a loan or charity and R' Yehudah complied, what would have been so great in that? He was a wealthy man, and by Jewish law was obligated to give a loan or charity. If he were asked to intercede on someone's behalf and pay a visit to the king — that, too, would have been his obligation. To try to bring about peace between people, or to attend a seudas mitzvah — all these were obligations. But R' Yehudah meant what he said: If a coal merchant asked him to look after his shop, he would do that, too, with joy.

"And if Rabbeinu Hakadosh was prepared to make light of his own honor in fulfilling a coal man's request," concluded R' Yehudah ben Attar, "how much more so should I, his servant."

An Outstanding Host

"Spend the night and wash your feet" (Bereishis 19:2)

The door of R' Boruch Mordechai Tcherny's house was always open wide for everyone. Poor people could make themselves at home there. So outstanding was R' Boruch Mordechai's chesed that he did not mind at all what people did to any of his belongings beneath his roof. In fact, he treated himself exactly the way he treated his guests.

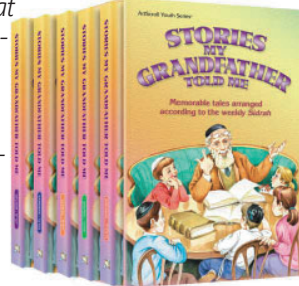
Once, a poor man came to his house and remained for several weeks with-

out recognizing that R' Boruch Mordechai was his host. In his innocence, the guest thought that R' Boruch Mordechai — who always dressed simply, in the manner of those he welcomed into his home — was merely another poor guest. After a lengthy period, the poor man turned to R' Boruch Mordechai and said, "I see that you are an old-timer here. You surely know how things work in this place. Tell me: Do you think anyone will mind if I stay on another few days?"

R' Boruch Mordechai shrugged. "I think you can stay. Look at me; I've

been here for quite some time, I sleep here and eat here at the host's expense, and no one says a word."

Stories My Grandfather Told Me by Zev Greenwald (Author) Libby Lazewnik (Translator) and Tova Katz (illustrator) is packed with short pleasant stories that teach children important life lessons from the weekly Parsha. The five-volume set is available from your favorite Jewish book store, or at artscroll.com.



The Father is Also Cured

And he saw and lo! there were three men standing by him. And he saw and he ran towards them (18:2)

Two infants had been born on the same day in Brody and both of them were to be circumcised on the eighth day. The first bris took place immediately after the early dawn prayers. R' Avraham, the Maggid of Trisk, was the sandak.

The second bris was being delayed. The infant's father lay on his deathbed and the custom in such a tragic situation had always been to postpone the bris until the father died so that the infant could bear his name. And so the family waited.

R' Shlomo Kluger, rabbi of Brody, had been invited to serve as the sandak of this child. When he learned that the family was waiting for the father to die, he was horrified. He went quickly to R' Avraham and urged that he come with him quickly. They went to the home of the dying man; they found him lying with his eyes tightly shut, his breathing

very labored. A minyan of men stood around with candles lit, waiting for the soul to depart.

"Stop this! Extinguish those candles at once. We are about to perform a bris!" R' Shlomo commanded. At the word 'bris' the father's eyelids fluttered. R' Shlomo began the ceremony. Suddenly the father's eyes flew open and he asked for some water to wash his hands. After he had washed them, he said that he would like to recite the traditional father's blessing, "...to enter him into the covenant of Avraham Avinu." The ceremony was concluded with great rejoicing.

In the following days the father grew better and better until he recuperated completely and lived for many years. When R' Shlomo Kluger left the house with the guest, R' Avraham of Trisk, he said, "Do not think for a moment that I have just performed a miracle in bringing about the father's amazing recovery. Not at all. I applied what I learned from the words of our Sages

regarding the three angels who visited Avraham. They say that one came to heal Avraham, another to destroy Sodom and a third to inform Sarah of the good news of the future birth of Yitzchak; the third one was also to rescue Lot.

'Why thought I, was it necessary to send one angel to perform these two tasks? Is there a shortage of angels in heaven?!' The answer is that Lot's merit alone would not have been enough to summon an angel down from heaven. But since he had already come to tell Sarah the good tidings, he was able to save Lot as well.

"Here, too, perhaps, the father's merit alone may not have been enough to warrant a special angel coming to cure him. But when we began the bris ceremony, the Angel of the Covenant — Eliyahu Hanavi, came, as he always comes. And once he was here already, he was able to cure the father. And as you see, honored Maggid, my reasoning was correct!"

Joining in the Mitzvah

And he planted an 'eishel' (tamarisk tree) (21:33)

R' Elimelech of Lizensk was a beloved and famous Rebbe. Wherever he went he was given a grand welcome and when he left, a honorable leave-taking. Jews everywhere flocked to receive his blessing or, at the least, to gaze at his holy face and be inspired.

One time when R' Elimelech was leaving a city, everyone turned out to see him on his way. R' Elimelech who was riding in his carriage chanced to

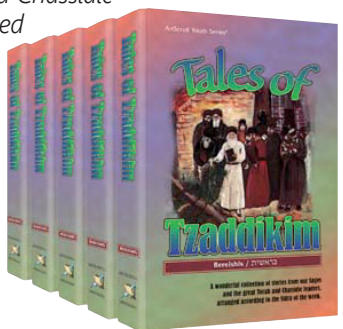
glance back and saw the crowd of people streaming behind. Suddenly he turned to his driver and asked him to stop the coach. He got out and joined the crowd.

"What is the matter, R' Elimelech?" people asked. "Why did you get out to walk?"

He smiled and answered, "I saw this large group of Jews eagerly performing the important mitzvah of seeing off guests, and I, too, wished to, some-

how, join in the mitzvah.

Tales of Tzadikim by G. Matov is a wonderful collection of stories from our Sages and the great Torah and Chassidic leaders, arranged according to the Sidra. The five-volume set is available from your favorite Jewish book store, or online at artscroll.com.



PARSHA PUZZLERS

TEST YOUR PARSHA KNOWLEDGE

by Sammy Schaechter
and Dovid Saleman
Answers on page 7.

HARD Qs

- Why did Hashem visit Avraham?
- How many angels came to visit Avraham?
- What messages did the angels bring?
- What was Sarah's response when she heard she was going to have a child?
- Why did Hashem want to destroy Sodom?
- How did Avraham try and save Sodom?
- What did Lot's wife turn into when she looked back at Sodom being destroyed?
- What did Hashem command Avraham to do to his son Yitzchak?
- Who stopped Avraham from doing it?
- What did he do instead?
- Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the brit mila?
- Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
- When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He changed some of the wording. Why?
- What were the missions of the three angels?
- Why did Avraham specifically ask Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
- How many angels went to Sodom?
- Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
- Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
- Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
- In what merit did G-d save Lot?
- Lot served the angels matza. Why?
- Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
- Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
- Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
- Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
- Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the akeidah (binding)?

MEDIUM Qs

- How old were Avraham and Sarah when Yitzchak was born?
- At what number of tzadikim did Avraham stop asking Hashem not to destroy Sodom?
- Why weren't Lot and his family allowed to turn around and look at Sodom being destroyed?
- Why did Sarah want to send Yishmael away?
- Where did Avraham and Yitzchak go for the Akeidah?

SUPER HARD Qs

- What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
- Why did the angels ask Avraham

CRACK THE PARSHA CODE

by Rabbi Yaakov Levine
Answers on page 7.

- A was S by the D of his T W for G
- 3 M D like P came to V A, who was recovering from his B
- A R to S his G. he G them M, and T with M
- When they A A where his W was, he said she was in the T
- They T him that in 1 Y, S will have a B B
- When S H that she would G B, she L
- 1 M told A that the C of S will be D
- A D that S should not be D if there was enough T in the C
- L was S along with his W and 2 D, but his W became S when she L B
- S wanted to S Y A, so that Y won't be affected by him. H told A to L to S
- H D that Y shouldn't D of T, and a M happened
- H C A to B Y as a K
- When Y realized that he was the K, he W happily
- a R was S in the B, and A used that as a K instead of Y

Rabbi Yaakov Levine is the 5th grade rebbe and afternoon mashgiach at Yeshiva Toras Moshe in Queens, NY. He is also the Night Activity Director and a rebbe at Camp Lemala. Rabbi Levine can be reached by email at rabbiylevine@gmail.com

- where Sarah was?
- Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
 - Why do you think Avraham ask the guests to wash the dust off their feet?

DISCUSSION Qs

PARSHA PUZZLERS

TORAH RHYMES & RIDDLES

Answers on page 7.

- I Three angels stopped to visit me,
They were dressed like men
Said I, "First wash and eat a meal.
Then go your way again!"

- I welcomed strangers to my home
And royally they dined.
When wicked men banged on the door
The strangers struck them blind!

- An angel came to save my life
And now it's all my fault!
- I turned around to take a peek
And now I've turned to salt.

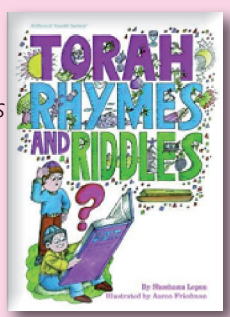
- I am the mighty king of Gerar
And I saw Sarah from afar.
I wanted her to marry me
But I was forced to set her free!

- People laughed when I was born.
My story soon was told:
"Sarah has at last a son,
When she is gray and old."

- I once was Sarah's servant girl,
But she told me to go.
For my son teased hers

- with his weapons
His arrow and his bow.-----
- In the desert I have grown,
With no place to call my own.
I live a rough and wild life,
Hunting with my bow and knife.

Torah Rhymes and Riddles by Shoshana Lapon (Author) and Aaron Friedman (Illustrator) is filled with rhyming riddles that test young children's comprehension of the weekly Parsha. For more great children's Torah books, visit artscroll.com



PARSHA STORIES

STORIES MY GRANDFATHER TOLD ME

The Uninvited Guest

"Is it not small? And let my soul live." (Bereishis 19:20)

One Shabbos Shuvah afternoon, as the sun set and shadows filled the beis midrash of Yeshivas Eitz Chaim, R' Isser Zalman Meltzer addressed his students.

"We are all believers, and the sons of believers. Now the Day of Judgment is approaching, the day when every living being passes before the King of kings. But where is the fear? How is it that we are not terrified? Where is our fear of the Day of Judgment?"

"The answer is that we have grown used to these Days of Judgment. We have already lived through a number of Rosh Hashanahs. For forty-five years, say, Rosh Hashanah has come and gone, and nothing has happened—"

Slowly, the great room became even darker. Shabbos was already over, but

no one made a move to turn on a light. The darkness joined R' Isser Zalman's deep voice in creating the proper awe-inspiring atmosphere for the Day of Judgment.

"But really," R' Isser Zalman continued, tears on his cheeks, "This way of thinking is fundamentally flawed. In Slobodka, we once heard R' Yitzchak Blazer say that when Lot and his daughters fled from Sodom, Lot asked the angels to send him to the city of Tzo'ar. Why did Lot wish to go to that specific city?"

"Rashi explains that Tzo'ar was founded one year after Sodom, and so its sins were fewer than Sodom's. Tzo'ar was still not filled to the brim with sin and did not yet deserve to be destroyed. 'Is it not small? And let my soul live.'

"And maybe," the gaon's voice trem-

bled as he wept, "maybe on Rosh Hashanah of last year, I fell into the category of 'Tzo'ar.' Maybe last year my quota of sin was not yet filled to the brim, and was not yet worthy of the death sentence.

"But this year, after another full year without repenting, have I reached, Heaven forbid, the category of Sodom? Has my quota for sin been filled this year?"

Stories My Grandfather Told Me by Zev Greenwald (Author) Libby Lazewnik (Translator) and Tova Katz (illustrator) is packed with short pleasant stories that teach children important life lessons from the weekly Parsha. The five-volume set is available from your favorite Jewish book store, or at artscroll.com.

