

# Vayera

Rachel Dembo

Shabbat Shalom

My torah portion today is Vayera. As the Parashah begins, Abraham is sitting outside of his tent and sees 3 men approaching. These men are actually messengers from God. They tell Abraham that Sarah will have a baby even though she is really old. Sarah laughs at the news that was delivered by the messengers. Abraham then travels with these men to Sodom because God is going to destroy the city. Abraham argues with God to try to save innocent people from death. Abraham loses the debate with God when even 10 righteous people could not be found in the City. Abraham and the messengers arrive at Sodom and Lot, Abraham's nephew, protects them from the mean Sodomites. They tell Lot that God is going to destroy the City, to leave and not look back at the destruction. Lot hesitated to leave but finally did so after the angels insisted. As we know, Lot's wife does turn back and becomes a pillar of salt. Just as the messengers said, Isaac was born to Sarah and Abraham. When Isaac was three, Sarah becomes jealous of Ishmael's relationship with Abraham and insisted that Abraham send Ishmael and his mother, Hager away. God Spoke to Abraham and assured him that Ishmael will be ok and to follow Sarah's wishes. Abraham sends Hager and Ishmael away and God Kept his word. After several years, God appears to Abraham and commands him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham travels to Mount Moriah, binds up Isaac and raises his knife to slaughter him. He is stopped by God, who provides a ram as a substitute. Abraham and Isaac return to their home in Beer Sheba.

Throughout the Parashah, our ancestors, Abraham, Sarah, and Lot, talked to God either directly or followed his commands through his messengers. Sometimes they followed God's instructions without question, sometimes they argued with him, other times they hesitated or laughed at what God said He was going to do or in the case of Lot's wife even refused to follow his instructions. But each of them had a relationship with God either directly or through his angels. Through his relationship with God and his messengers, Abraham learned to have faith in God and to trust him. One commentator wrote that because Abraham had faith in God, "God was assured that Abraham was truly worthy of being the father of the nation of Israel."

Our ancestor's relationship with God and his messengers throughout this Torah portion reminded me of a story that a teacher told me last year in school. A man was caught in a terrible flood. Over and over again, rescuers came either by boat or helicopter to save him from drowning in the flood. His response each time the rescuers came was that he was waiting for God to rescue him. Unfortunately, the man drowns. When he gets to heaven, he asks God, "why didn't you save me from drowning?" God replied. "**BUT I TRIED!** I sent you helicopters and boats but you refused to receive my help. What more could I have done?"

It is an interesting story because unlike the man who drowned, I feel that I am as lucky as Abraham, Sarah and Lot. I think that there is a piece of God in each person I meet or even in

the things that surround me. The piece of God may be something good or it may even be bad. But I do think whatever that piece of God is, it is here for me to understand and to learn from. I think this is why my parents have taught me to try to learn from each experience I have. They tell me to always look for the good, always be respectful of others, kind and giving. To me that is what being Jewish is about. To me, being Jewish is knowing that I have God in my life.

I also feel that I am lucky enough to have some of God's angels in my life. These angels help and guide me as I grow and learn. Believe it or not, sometimes I follow my Angel's directions with obedience, sometimes I debate and win and sometimes debate and lose. Sometimes my angels punish me and believe me it feels as harsh as the punishment Lot's wife received for not listening.

I would like to tell you about some angels I have in my life and what they have taught me:

My "Bubbie" got sick a few years ago. Her terrible illness made it impossible to move her body. It took her a long time to recover but she did. She is one of my angels from God because she taught me how someone can overcome struggles and obstacles with determination and without self pity.

Sometimes learning new topics in school can be very frustrating and difficult for me. I am lucky to have an "educational cheerleader" in my life. I am able to learn in a comfortable, quiet place and be open with her about my academic difficulties. Meg provides me with the tools to learn the topics I am struggling with. She is one of my angels from God because she provides me with confidence tools to meet my educational challenges. She teaches me to push myself, to stretch and grow even if it is difficult to do so.

My parents aim high and have high expectations for themselves and for me. This influences me to work hard and do my best. My parents are angels from God because they are my strongest supporters. They are always there for me ready to listen and help.

Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin states that a Bat Mitzvah means someone who is "old enough to be responsible for a mitzvot." The Rabbi also says that being a Bat Mitzvah "...is about becoming a fuller member of the Jewish community. It is about moral responsibility, about connecting to Torah, to community, to God." Mrs. Fox asked me if I would be a volunteer in a new program she will be starting. The program is to help kids with disabilities learn about Judaism. I am excited to participate in this program. I will now have the responsibility to bring something special to other kid's lives. Special people have been there for me and I am excited to be there for others.

I would like to thank Rabbi Small, Mrs. Fox, Cantor Cohn and all my teachers for their unbelievable support and help. You rock. I would especially like to thank Rhonda Holtman for being there everyday helping me study and practice so I could "knock the socks off the Cantor". Well I did because of you, Rachael.