

What Must Leave Before Shabbos Enters?

EREV SHABBOS DRUSH | PARSHAS VAYEIRA

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1. The phone is away. Is its influence away?

A person puts his phone away before Shabbos. The messages stop. The news stops. The endless stream of opinions, arguments, images, and demands finally becomes quiet. But there is a question we have to ask: **The phone has been put away. Has its influence been put away?**

What we heard on Monday does not necessarily leave us on Friday. A misleading report can remain in our thinking. An ugly image can remain in our imagination. A cynical remark can change how we look at another person. We can sit at a beautiful Shabbos table carrying the anger, the fears, and the false assumptions we absorbed throughout the week.

How do we drive out something that has already entered? Our parsha gives us a powerful insight into that question.¹

2. Where is the Avraham we know?

The Torah tells us: “**וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֹקֶר וַיִּקַּח לֶחֶם וְחֶמֶת מִיַּם וַיֵּתֵן אֶל הָגָר. וַיִּשְׁלַח.**” “Avraham arose early in the morning, took bread and a waterskin, gave them to Hagar ... and sent her away” (Bereishis 21:14).

Stop for a moment and picture this scene. This is Avraham Avinu, the great pillar of chesed. Earlier in the parsha, three strangers arrive. Avraham is recovering from his bris milah. Nevertheless, he runs toward them, urges them to stay, arranges water for their feet, and prepares an extraordinary meal.

The Torah describes his enthusiasm: “**וַיַּמְהֵר אַבְרָהָם**” - “Avraham hurried”; “**וְאֵל הַבָּקָר רָץ אַבְרָהָם**” - “Avraham ran to the cattle.” Every movement expresses eagerness. His guests must feel welcome. They must be properly

fed. They must know that he is happy to have them.

With the malachim, the Torah records not only his generosity but the way he gave: warmly, eagerly, and quickly. Yet when Hagar and Yishmael leave his home, the Torah describes bread and water.

Question one: Where is the Avraham we know? How can the man who gives so generously to strangers send members of his own household away with such limited provisions? The Ibn Ezra raises the difficulty of Yishmael being sent away empty-handed. The contrast demands an explanation.

The answer begins with something fundamental about Avraham. His chesed was extraordinary. But there was something higher even than his deeply rooted desire to give.

Answer one: Avraham's highest commitment was to obey Hashem, even when obedience required him to act against his natural expression of chesed.

Sarah had said: **“גרש האמה הזאת ואת בנה”** - “Drive out this maidservant and her son.” Avraham was deeply distressed. Hashem then told him: **“שמע בקלה”** - **“כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה”** (Bereishis 21:10-12). Avraham obeyed.

Avraham's kindness was an expression of his service of Hashem. When Hashem required an exceptional act that ran against his usual expression of kindness, he submitted his own inclination to that command. That is why this episode cannot be judged simply by asking what Avraham would ordinarily have wanted to do.

We find the same submission elsewhere in his life. At his bris milah, Avraham expressed concern about the effect upon his ability to draw people close, yet fulfilled Hashem's command. At the Akeidah, his love for Yitzchak did not displace his obedience. He did not make his own feelings, even his finest feelings, the final authority.

3. Why drive out? Why not simply send away?

Question two: Why did Sarah demand “גרש” - drive them out? Why could Yishmael not simply be sent away respectfully? Perhaps he could no longer remain in the home. But could the departure not have been arranged gently?

This question is brought in Derech Sichah, in the name of Rav Chaim Kanievsky quoting his father, the Steipler. Why the language of expulsion? To appreciate the question, consider something that sometimes happens in a yeshivah.

A young man is struggling. His conduct is deteriorating. The rosh yeshivah wants to help him. He thinks about the young man's future and searches for a way to keep him within a good environment. But there are other students in the yeshivah. What happens when this young man begins damaging them?

The rosh yeshivah must weigh two responsibilities. He must care about the student who is struggling, and he must protect those being influenced by him. Eventually, he may have no choice: the student must leave. Keeping him can endanger everyone around him. A rotten apple can affect those beside it; separating it protects the rest.

But that explains why the student has to be removed. It does not yet explain why the removal must communicate emphatic rejection. Likewise, we understand Sarah's concern for Yitzchak. But why insist on “גרש”?

4. What about the influence of yesterday?

Yishmael was fourteen years older than Yitzchak. Following the chronology used here, the two boys had shared Avraham's home for approximately five years. Sarah saw Yishmael being “**מצחק**.” Rashi explains that expression through associations with avodah zarah, giluy arayos, and shefichus damim.

This was a serious threat to the child from whom Klal Yisrael would emerge. Avraham considered whether Yishmael could remain and be helped. Hashem instructed him to listen to Sarah. But now comes the deeper problem.

Question three: Removing Yishmael would prevent tomorrow's influence. What would remove the influence of yesterday? What about those years they had already spent together? What had Yitzchak seen? What

had he heard? What impressions might have formed?

Yishmael could leave the house while something of Yishmael remained inside Yitzchak.

Physical separation alone would not necessarily remove that. We can understand the problem through a striking account concerning the grandfather of Rav Elyashiv, the great mekubal known as the Leshem.

A young man had heard a Torah thought from someone whose spiritual character was questionable. Impressed by what he had heard, he enthusiastically repeated it in the Leshem's presence. The Leshem responded sharply. He did not want to hear the teaching repeated from that source. He made clear that this was someone from whom his grandson could not accept spiritual instruction.

Why such force? The encounter had already taken place. The young man had already heard the speaker, enjoyed the thought, and been impressed. Simply advising him to be more careful in the future might leave that admiration untouched.

The response had to reach back to the impression already formed. The young man needed to reconsider the standing he had given that person. Someone could say something appealing without becoming a trustworthy spiritual guide. An influence already absorbed sometimes requires an explicit rejection before it begins to lose its hold.

Answers two and three: The manner of the separation had to uproot the influence of the past, as well as prevent influence in the future.

Imagine Yitzchak watching his father. His father is Avraham Avinu. His home is a home of kindness, warmth, and compassion. Yet now his father sends Yishmael away with a severity that seems entirely unlike his usual conduct.

We can imagine the questions this could awaken in Yitzchak. Why is my father acting this way? Where is the warmth he extends to everyone? If Yishmael has to leave, why can the departure not be arranged with greater affection? Could this seem like a contradiction to everything his father had taught him?

Those very questions could bring Yitzchak to a powerful realization. If his father, whose kindness he knew so well, was acting with such exceptional firmness, the danger must be exceptional. If Hashem had instructed Avraham to listen to Sarah, and Avraham was prepared to act against his deepest inclination, Yishmael's conduct could not be dismissed as harmless.

The manner of Yishmael's departure taught Yitzchak how decisively he had to reject Yishmael's earlier influence. Whatever admiration or attachment might have existed had to be reconsidered. What had seemed familiar could no longer be treated as acceptable.

That is what we mean by addressing the influence retroactively. The years had happened. But their negative influence had to be driven out. Sarah was protecting Yitzchak's future by confronting what might remain from his past. She cherished Yitzchak and understood what his future meant for Klal Yisrael. Her love demanded protection.

5. The voices we carry into Shabbos

Now let us bring that into our lives. We live in galus. And we must understand that galus can enter our homes and our thoughts. It can influence what we admire, what we fear, and what we accept as normal.

Technology gives the outside world constant access to us. It speaks when we wake up. It accompanies us through the day. It can be the last voice we hear before going to sleep. News, commentary, advertisements, entertainment, and social media can shape our understanding of life.

A news report can describe an event while shaping whom we blame, whose pain we notice, and whose suffering we overlook. Reports can be selective, misleading, or false. We must examine what we hear. We cannot surrender our judgment simply because someone presents a claim confidently.

But constant exposure creates another danger: **even when we question the facts, we can absorb the outlook.** We know that a source has an agenda.

Nevertheless, after listening repeatedly, we begin speaking its language. We become more cynical, more angry, or more frightened. We begin feeling embarrassed about something the Torah tells us to cherish, or admiring something the Torah tells us to reject.

We have to understand the seriousness of this struggle. There are influences hostile to Torah and kedushah. They do not become harmless because they arrive through an attractive screen. Sarah understood that even Avraham's home required protection. Our homes require protection too.

Then Erev Shabbos arrives. We put the phone away. We stop checking the news. The incoming stream ends. But Sarah's question remains: **What about what has already entered?** We have stopped receiving new messages. What happens to the messages already living inside us?

That is where we need an avodah of **"גרש."** The word shares its root with gerushin, divorce. Divorce brings a decisive ending to a marital bond. We can draw upon that image of decisiveness when confronting a damaging spiritual attachment. We must end its hold upon us and reach back to what we have already accepted.

"I heard that repeatedly. But repetition did not make it true. I allowed that voice to fill me with anger. I am no longer granting it that authority. I began accepting an outlook that conflicts with Torah. I reject it."

We wash our bodies and change our clothing before Shabbos. We prepare the home and put away the devices. Let those preparations also prompt us to consider what our minds have taken in, and what must lose its welcome there.

6. The call they refused to answer

The Farhi brothers owned a jewelry store in Williamsburg. On Friday night, their security company left an urgent message about a suspected break-in, telling them to come immediately. The safe held gold belonging to them and to others.²

Albert resolved not to violate Shabbos, accepting that their property was in Hashem's hands. His brother agreed. They returned to their meal. When another message came Shabbos morning, they continued their prayers and meals.

They reached the store around eleven on Motzaei Shabbos. Windows were broken and gold watches were missing. One brother entered the inner room while the other remained outside saying Tehillim. The safe looked locked, but he feared it had been breached from the adjoining premises. Trembling and struggling to recall the combination, he opened it after about ten minutes. Everything inside remained.

Police asked why they had not come earlier. An officer directed them upstairs, where a bag containing a gun and ammunition lay. He explained that thieves had waited above the safe, expecting the alarm to bring the owners. Once they opened it, the thieves intended to shoot them and steal its contents. Eventually, the thieves left. Shabbos had kept the brothers away from the trap.

Let us pause over what that decision meant. A jewelry business can represent years of work, money invested, responsibilities accepted, and commitments to other people. The message reached precisely the place where a businessman feels most vulnerable: everything you have built may be disappearing, and you are being told to come now.

We can imagine the questions such a message would raise. What has happened to the merchandise? How much will be left? What will tomorrow bring? The pressure was real. Their commitment was made while the loss still seemed entirely possible.

They did not know that staying home would save their lives. They knew that Shabbos belonged to Hashem. The store could not be allowed to dictate their conduct on His day. Their decision did not depend on being promised a

happy ending.

Their separation from the business was real before they knew the outcome. They were prepared to bear a loss rather than surrender Shabbos.

And notice something else. They did more than refrain from answering a telephone. They returned to the life of Shabbos: its tefillos and its seudos. The demand from outside was not permitted to replace the day they were living inside.

That is the point we need. A person can put away his device while allowing everything it delivered to continue occupying him. His body is at the table, but his mind is still arguing with the commentator. He is holding a siddur, but his thoughts are still being directed by the week's anger. The device is silent; its influence is still speaking.

The brothers' story gives us a vivid picture of a boundary that holds even under pressure. Our application is to make that boundary inward as well. The week's falsehood must lose its authority over our minds, because we want to protect the Shabbos we love.

7. Love makes us reject what threatens it

There is a critical point here. Deep love carries a corresponding rejection of whatever threatens the beloved. A parent who cherishes a child cannot be indifferent to something that is poisoning the child. The more precious the child is, the more firmly the parent wants the danger removed.

When something is precious to us, we cannot remain neutral toward what would damage it.

This helps us understand Dovid HaMelech's words: **"הלוא משנאיך ה' אשנא"** - "Do I not hate those who hate You, Hashem?" (Tehillim 139:21). His love for Hashem made opposition to Hashem intolerable to him. Those who rose

against Hashem opposed the One to Whom his life was devoted.

And in Kabbalas Shabbos we say: “אהבי ה' שנאו רע” - “Those who love Hashem, hate evil” (Tehillim 97:10). Notice the order. First comes love of Hashem. From that love comes the rejection of evil. Evil contradicts His will and clouds our awareness of Him. Because that relationship is precious, we must reject what damages it.

That is also the heart of Sarah's demand. Sarah loved Yitzchak. She understood the preciousness of his neshamah and the future of Klal Yisrael that would emerge from him. She therefore insisted upon a complete break with Yishmael's corrupting influence. She could not be satisfied with a departure that left his spiritual hold intact.

Her love demanded that even the influence already absorbed be confronted and uprooted. Yishmael had to leave in a way that would teach Yitzchak to reject what he had seen and heard during their years together. The connection to that harmful way of life had to be severed.

Now apply that to Shabbos. How much do we love Shabbos? How much do we want its kedushah, its menuchah, its closeness to Hashem? How much do we want to appreciate our families and feel gratitude for the blessings He has given us?

If those gifts are precious to us, then whatever threatens them must become unacceptable to us. We cannot remain attached to an influence that fills our Shabbos with contempt, agitation, cynicism, or falsehood. We must recognize it as an enemy of something we cherish, and utterly reject its claim upon us.

Sarah cherished Yitzchak, so she drove out what threatened him. We cherish Shabbos, so we must drive out what would damage it.

We are in galus, exposed to powerful influences. But our home can be a place where Torah determines what deserves honour and what must be rejected. This firmness comes from love for Hashem, for Klal Yisrael, and for the kedushah of the Jewish home.

8. One sentence in Kabbalas Shabbos

Here is one specific thing to do. Before Kabbalas Shabbos, identify **one falsehood or destructive attitude absorbed during the week that could damage your Shabbos**. Choose something definite. Then, when you reach the words “אהבי ה' שנאו רע,” consciously reject that influence because you love what it threatens.

For example, perhaps repeated mockery of Torah made you feel embarrassed about living differently. You do not want that contempt following you into your tefillah or your home. At “שנאו רע,” reject that judgment: “Their contempt is wrong. Torah deserves my honour. I refuse to carry their mockery into my Shabbos.”

Or perhaps a stream of angry commentary has made you impatient and suspicious of everyone. You recognize that it could rob your family of a peaceful Shabbos. At those words, reject the attitude you absorbed: “I will not let that voice determine how I see the people at my table.”

At “אהבי ה' שנאו רע,” have this in mind:

“Hashem, I love You, and I cherish Your Shabbos. This influence threatens the connection I want with You and the Shabbos I want to bring into my home. I reject it. I withdraw my agreement with it. I do not want it damaging what I love.”

We are reaching back to what has already entered. We are recognizing it, rejecting its authority, and refusing to keep endorsing it. That is a concrete beginning to undoing its influence. The point is to protect our capacity to experience Shabbos.

Then we can appreciate the positive impact of the week. There was honest effort. There were mitzvos, learning, kindness, and opportunities to help. Hashem sustained us. People cared for us. There were moments of growth that the noise nearly concealed.

We want to bring that good into Shabbos: gratitude, affection, the satisfaction of a mitzvah, and appreciation for Hashem's kindness. The falsehood that obscures those gifts must lose its place at our table.

The Farhi brothers held their boundary before they knew what it would save. Sarah insisted upon her boundary because she understood what it had to protect. We, too, must understand what is at stake. We love Hashem. We love Shabbos. We love the Jewish home and the people Hashem has entrusted to us.

**Because we love Shabbos, we reject what would damage it.
Because we want to draw close, we drive out what stands
between us.**

Good Shabbos.

1. Adapted from Rabbi Menachem Stein, Na'eh Doresh, Parshas Vayeira, "גירוש ישמעאל - טהרת נפשו של יצחק - למה?", pp. 349-353. The application to technology, Shabbos, and the proposed kavanah develops the central teaching further.

2. Rav Elimelech Biderman, Be'er HaParashah, Yisro 5781, reproduced by Dirshu. He states that he heard the account from the Farhi brothers. The incident is retold above in paraphrase; the reflections that follow develop its application to this drush.