YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

Parashat VAYERA

SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

"And Avraham Returned to His Place"

Adapted by Gabi Spiewak and Aryeh Dienstag

"And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left off speaking to Avraham; and Avraham returned to his place." (*Bereishit* 18:33)

The *Midrash* asks many questions about the dialogue between God and Avraham regarding Sedom. Where was Avraham coming from? Who ended the conversation? Did the Judge tell the defense attorney He had heard enough, or did the defense attorney simply give up?

However, I want to focus on a different question: where was Avraham going? After such a demanding and exalted dialogue with God, where was there for him to go? Similarly, when Avraham set out to sacrifice Yitzchak*,* he was required to reach the utmost level of commitment to God; where could he go after attaining this peak of devotion? Would not anything afterwards be a descent?

After the *akeida*, Avraham descended the mountain and we read, "So Avraham returned unto his young men" (22:19), namely, the two young men who had waited for him at some distance from Mt. Moriah. He descended not only from the mountain, but from the exalted spiritual atmosphere of Moriah, and then confronted ordinary individuals who had no inkling of what he had gone through. Similarly, all of our great spiritual giants, other than Moshe, returned to live among ordinary people.

Furthermore, Avraham's devotion to humanity did not allow him to flinch on his descent from the mountain. He understood that the Jewish way is not one of separation and asceticism (aside, perhaps, from intensive years of study and development during one's formative years). Rather, a Jew is charged to confront and change the world – even if it is not ideal.

Like Avraham, the Jew sees that not all is right with the world, but nevertheless does not remove himself from it. Rather, he sees it, in its actuality and in its potential, as God did when He cast a backwards glance at His creation: "And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good" (1:31). We can be critical, but with the understanding that we appreciate the world for what it is and what it can be. Therefore, we strive to participate and to bring the world to greater perfection. With this understanding, we can appreciate the full import of Avraham's actions. Following his exalted encounter with God, he returned to his tent and continued to welcome in dusty wayfarers and offer them hospitality.

(This *sicha* was delivered at *seuda shelishit*, Shabbat *parashat* *Vayera* 5766 [2005].)