

Shabbat Vayera ShaLom



by Phyllis Chesler

Too, too, much is contained herein—as Shakespeare might have said.

This parsha is filled with heavenly angels on earthly missions—they roam the earth and can be seen and heard by our esteemed ancestors. On a very hot day, probably at midday, three “anashim,” men, or rather, angels who appear to be men, are suddenly standing near or above Avraham. Their missions? To tell the aged Sarah that she will bear a son; to destroy S’dom; either to save Lot or to stop Avraham from killing Yitzhak. The Akeda is problematic, puzzling in so many ways. In those days, everyone was busy sacrificing their sons; why did God command Avraham to also do so—to test his faith and/or to teach him and all humanity that Jews do not believe in

child sacrifice? To have something concrete to show the nations about why God chose Avraham? (This very point was made earlier today by Rabbi Ben Skydell, in a shiur, citing many sources).

There is much here about the status of women (not good, offered to dangerous men by their fathers and husbands); but, we also see women as incredibly bold in terms of sacred missions. For example, Lot's eldest daughter who, believing that all humanity had been destroyed, sought to repopulate the earth by initiating a night in her drunken father's bed. Of course, her baby, Moav, led to the founding of Ruth's nation and to David's messianic lineage.

This parsha also teaches us the importance of hospitality. And here's a question. What did Avraham feed the three angels? Rather, what did Rashi think he did? We know that he told Sarah to prepare cakes ("ugot") but he rushed to get the choicest of his cattle. The Torah clearly says (17:7-8) that he served the meat with butter and milk, ("kosher" for the times), but Rashi thinks otherwise. He comments: "There were three calves so that he might feed them three tongues ("l'shonot") together with mustard ("b"hardal'). The great Rashi was a deli man! Now we know what he loved to eat.

Rashi's poignant, self-revelatory comment was pointed out to me by the late Avi Fink many years ago and I've never forgotten it.

A very good Shabbat to you.