

Challenging G*d! **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

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Parshat Vayera

G*d advises Abraham (Genesis 18:20) that, because of the great transgressions committed by the residents of Sodom, G*d would destroy the city. Abraham – the same Abraham who had allowed his first wife Sarah to abuse his second wife Hagar so badly that, pregnant though she was, she fled to the wilderness to escape; the same Abraham who would later expel his wife Hagar and son Ishmael so that Isaac, the son of his favored wife Sarah, would have no rival; the same Abraham who would meekly follow G*d's order to offer his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice – Abraham speaks up (Genesis 18:23-25) and challenges G*d.

“Suppose there are fifty innocent people in the city? . . . Shall not the Judge of all the world act justly?”

G*d concedes (18:26), and Abraham (18:27-32) bargains G*d down.

Suppose there are forty-five? . . . Forty? . . . Thirty? . . . Twenty? . . . Ten?

And G*d agrees (27:33) to spare the city if as few as ten innocents can be found therein.

What has Abraham done? He has dared to challenge G*d! He has dared to say – as, later, Moses was to say – “G*d, Thou art not G*dding properly. Thou canst do better, and we expect better of Thee.”

And, when we present the case well, G*d concedes.

In all our religious traditions, we have had “G*d-wrestlers.” As G*d's children, it is up to us to call G*d to account; the relationship does not flow only in one direction. Indeed, our master and teacher, Rebbe Moshe Leib of Sassov, went so far as to tell his followers that there are times when we must actually believe that there is no G*d!

“When one who is needy,” he said, “comes to ask you for bread, you must not send him away with such comforting words as, ‘G*d will provide,’ nor may you use G*d as an excuse by saying, ‘If G*d wanted you to have my money, then you would have it.’ At that moment, there is no G*d, and you are the only one who can help!”

To G*d-wrestling, and to an awareness of the value of disbelief, may we speedily be drawn.

Shabbat Shalom.