**What Did You See?**

D’Var Vayera

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Vayera is the passive form of the word, ra-ah, see. And woven throughout the parsha, from beginning to end, are references to seeing and looking and eyes and blindness; which of course, are all related to seeing.

So, what does it mean to see? Seeing can mean visually discerning with the eyes; mentally deducing something after thinking about; suddenly realizing a truth, and more. Seeing can have various levels of meaning in English. So too in Hebrew. And I think that when we read this parsha, we are meant to see seeing references as more than just related to sight.

In the beginning of the parsha, blindness, destruction and death are brought upon a city because of their sin. But at the end of our parsha, truth, prayer, and kindness bring about blessings of healing, restoration, and life. In Sodom, light is used to blind the eyes of people who strive to act disgracefully with two strangers. In Gerar, silver is used to symbolically blind the eyes of witnesses to prevent the disgrace of a stranger called Sarah.

While Abraham and Sarah are sojourning in Gerar, he says that Sarah is his sister, so Abimelech takes Sarah to his palace. God appears to him in a dream and warns him that he is about to die because of his sin. Shocked, Abimelech says “Lord, will you slay people even when they are innocent? When I did this, my heart was blameless and my hands were clean.” And God says to him, “I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against me.”

Early the next morning, Abimelech summons Avraham and says to him,

“How have I sinned against you that you brought this great sin upon my kingdom? **What did you see** that you did such a thing as this?”

And Abraham said, “I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.”

Once he learns the truth, Abimelech restores Sarah to Avraham’s household, gives Avraham gifts and says, “Here is my land before you. In the place that is **good in your eyes** settle. And he gave a thousand pieces of silver to Avraham to serve as a **covering of the eyes** for all who were with Sarah to vindicate Sarah.”

What Avraham saw (or perceived) in Gerar caused fear and blinded him to any other concern, including the wellbeing of his wife. But once Abimelech learnt the truth, he was quick to remedy his sin and in consideration for Sarah’s wellbeing, gave additional gifts to blind others’ eyes to what happened to Sarah and thus vindicate her. Abraham’s intercession brought about healing and rebirth for Abimelech’s entire household.

So, I think to myself, When Avraham dwelt in Gerar, did he **see** the people of Gerar or did he just see strangers? Did he equate the people of Gerar with the people of Sodom, believing that Gerar would treat two strangers (Sarah and himself) like Sodom treated their two strangers? Did he **see** no fear of God or did he **assume** no fear of God because they were strangers? And if he thought there was no fear of God in Gerar, did he not think about what kind of life Sarah would have in the palace?

We are not given the answers to these questions in the text. But I wonder if part of the reason God required Abraham to pray for Abimelech was to change Abraham’s heart towards Abimelech.

So, what do I see when I read this parsha?

I see that Gerar is not Sodom. Gerar is a dwelling, a lodging place, an encampment, a halting place. We, too, in a sense, are dwellers in Gerar. And we must be careful not to allow our previous experiences to colour our perception of the strangers around us. Or allow our fears to blind us to the wellbeing of our loved ones. Our fears can cause us to say and do things that bring harm to those we love. But truth, prayer and kindness can overcome spiritual barrenness and bring life and renewal.

What do you see?