**Parashat Vayera**

By looking at the story of the destruction of Sedom in this week’s parasha, Parashat Vayera, we learn important lessons about prayer.

After Hashem tells Avraham of His plans to destroy Sedom, Avraham begins negotiating. Avraham asks if Hashem will destroy the city even if He can find righteous men. As it’s written, “הַאַ֣ף תִּסְפֶּ֔ה צַדִּ֖יק עִם־רָשָֽׁע”– will you even destroy the righteous with the wicked (Beresheit 18:23). Avraham continues and asks Hashem if He will destroy it even if there are 50 righteous men. Hashem responds and says "If I find in Sedom fifty righteous men within the city, I will forgive the entire place for their sake" (Beresheit 18:26). The negotiation continues for the next few pesukim and ultimately Avraham gets down to the number 10 and Hashem says if He can find 10 righteous men He will not destroy Sedom. This encounter between Hashem and Avraham teaches us a very important lesson about prayer. In the end, Hashem did destroy Sedom, so it may seem like Avraham’s prayers were unheard, but in truth they were heard. Yes, Hashem did not grant Avraham his request and destroyed Sedom, but He did in fact hear his prayers as it’s written,

"וַיְהִ֗י בְּשַׁחֵ֤ת אֱלֹקים֙ אֶת־עָרֵ֣י הַכִּכָּ֔ר וַיִּזְכֹּ֥ר אֱלֹקים אֶת־אַבְרָהָ֑ם וַיְשַׁלַּ֤ח אֶת־לוֹט֙ מִתּ֣וֹךְ הַֽהֲפֵכָ֔ה בַּֽהֲפֹךְ֙ אֶת־הֶ֣עָרִ֔ים אֲשֶׁר־יָשַׁ֥ב בָּהֵ֖ן לֽוֹט"

Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval (Beresheit 19:29).

When Hashem was destroying Sedom he remembered Avraham’s prayers and saved Lot because of them . We must take away the following lesson from this pasuk: even if we feel like our prayers are not being answered the exact way we intended for them to be, we must remember that without our tefillot the situation could have turned out differently with a worse outcome.

Another lesson we learn about prayer is seen through the pesukim following the destruction of Sedom. The pasuk states, “Then Avraham woke up and went back to the place he stood before Hashem, “וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֥ם אַבְרָהָ֖ם בַּבֹּ֑קֶר אֶ֨ל־הַמָּק֔וֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָ֥מַד שָׁ֖ם אֶת־פְּנֵ֥י יְהֹוָֽה” (Beresheit 19:27). By depicting that Avraham returned to the place he last stood before Hashem, this pasuk shows us that Avraham had a designated spot for speaking with Hashem. Just like Avraham had a designated spot, so should we for our prayers. Having a specific place for prayer allows for more כוונה, focus, while praying and makes the process of prayer more special and one on one.

Furthermore, we see from the story of Avraham and Sedom that prayer is so powerful and should not be taken for granted. Next time we pray for something and it doesn’t turn out the way we want it to, we should remember this story, see the bigger picture, and know that things could have been worse without our prayers. We also see that we should take measures into making our prayers more meaningful, like designating a spot for ourselves to connect with Hashem.

Lynn Franco is honored to represent her community in Midreshet Torat Chessed this upcoming year. She says that growing up in a traditional home has taught her the importance of the Torah, as it is the guide book to life. She has also learned the value of her community and family. Lynn is forever grateful for all of her years of Yeshiva education. She attended Yeshivah of Flatbush from Atideinu until tenth grade. She then transferred and graduated from Hillel Yeshiva. Lynn always had a love for Israel but her passion grew after spending an adventurous summer there with ILEAD. Chessed has always been an integral part of Lynn’s life for as long as she can remember and that is why she is going to be spending the year giving back to others while learning in Israel.