**Vayeira 5776: Down to Earth**

By Rabbi Joshua (concretely known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

The Talmud (Chulin 89a) tells us that there were three great, humble people: Avraham, Moshe and King David. Avraham's humility is reflected in the verse in which he says, after beginning his negotiations with God over the fate of Sodom and its surrounding cities, "behold I have begun to speak with God and I am but dust and ashes" (Bereishis 18:31). He did not become haughty as a result of speaking to God in this way, but, rather, lowered himself.

Actually, Rav Moshe Yehudah Jakobovits, in his Zichron Moshe, points to another verse which demonstrates Avraham's humility, and underscores a singular aspect of his character and lifestyle, that informed all that he did. This verse is written after Avraham completed his discussion with God about the fate of the cities, and failed to save them. The verse says, "and Avraham returned to his place" (Bereishis 18:33). Rabbi Jakobovits says that this means that, even after the awesome experience of discussing divine justice with God Himself, Avraham returned to his mundane life, to continue his interaction with others, and did not adopt a feeling of superiority and self- importance that separated him from others. This typified  the life of Avraham. He reached great heights  in his relationship with God, but he used that relationship to enhance his work in this world, doing acts of kindness in emulation of His Creator. This was, in fact, the stated purpose of God in opening the discussion concerning the fate of Sodom and its cities, to teach Avraham the ways of justice in order to educate his family in them.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz writes in his Da'as Torah, that this commitment of Avraham  to utilize his relationship with God as a means of serving mankind is encapsulated in his interruption of his conversation with God at the beginning of Parshas Vayeira in order to serve his guests, following the principle that serving one's guests is more important than greeting the divine presence. The work of Avraham and the other patriarchs was in this world, serving as a model for future generations.