

November 3, 2012

Vayera (Genesis 18:1-22:24)

Central to the beginning of this week's Torah portion is the character of the two founders of Judaism. Abraham is one; God is the other. Our study this morning looked at both, and at what behaviors each of them is demonstrating and discussing, whether they are modeling behavior for us to emulate. And if we conclude they are modeling behavior meant for us, as many of the rabbinic commentators have postulated, we need to look at the ways in which we might imitate them.

Using Nehama Leibowitz's commentary on the first verse of this parashah, we discussed the Jewish practices of hospitality, of bikkur cholim (visiting the sick), and of acting for the good of our community. We also looked at the comforting, wordless presence one person can provide to another.

There was sufficient time in our study session for us to move into the second part of the portion, in which Abraham argues with God over the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, with its implications of the uniqueness of a two-way interaction with the Eternal, when we today find ourselves limited to a one-sided approach to God, if we choose to approach at all.

Very interesting is the line at 18:17, in which God asks Godself, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do. . .?" There are many reasons for the discussions of these few words, but the one begging for exploration today is the simple fact that the decision seems to have been made, and God does hide from us, not just God's plans or future actions, but the very appearance of God Godself.