

# Vayera: Life of the Party

- Mordechai Kamenetzky.

Story: A boy's question at a Sefer Torah writing ceremony - do you do Birthday Parties too?

## VAYERA: LIFE OF THE PARTY

(From: Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky ([rmk@torah.org](mailto:rmk@torah.org)) originally written in 5760)

"Was that some party!" Those words, often slurred, are often pronounced as revelers teeter from the exquisite ballrooms of posh hotels and banquet halls, fail to capture the essence of what truly makes a party great. But, what really makes a great party? The caterers will tell you, it's the food. Musicians claim it's the music and dancing. And of course florists will tell you it's the decor. This week, Rashi tells us it is absolutely something else. The Torah tells us of a party – a great party. Avraham was 100 years old and his wife Sora was 90 when Yitzchak was miraculously born. Three years later, when Yitzchak was weaned, they made what the Torah terms "a great party" (Genesis: 21:8). Which brings us back to our first question. What makes a great party? Rashi explains that it was great because "the great people of the generation attended: Shem the son of Noach, Aiver and Avimelech." Why does Rashi translate a great party as one that had great participants? Maybe it was great because it had a 14-piece band? Maybe it was great because it was held in the grand ballroom of the Canaan Hilton? Maybe Sora and Avraham hired the most exclusive caterer? What caused Rashi to explain "great party" as one with great people?

A number of weeks ago Yeshiva of South Shore in Hewlett, New York, hosted its first annual safrus exhibition in memory of Alisa Flatow, ob"m killed by Arab terrorists during a year of study in Israel. The fair, which highlighted the art of the sofer, the Jewish scribe, had an array of amazing hands-on exhibits. There were tables at which children were taught how to write letters for a Torah using a quill, parchment and special ink. There was another display that featured how tefillin are made from the hide to the holy. There was even an exhibit where students, aided by Yeshiva teachers, learned the art of tying the knots, creating the sacred fringes that transform a four-cornered garment into a talit-koton. But the highlight of the exhibition was the opportunity to participate in the writing of an actual Torah to be placed in the yeshiva's new sanctuary. The children sat with a sofer in front of the parchment and participated as the letters turned from words to sentences, converting raw cowhide into the most sacred item on earth. One 7-year-old, Moshe Daphna, went from table to table, learning the process of tefillin making, trying his hand at safrus calligraphy, and actually making a pair of tzitzis. Finally, he had the opportunity to participate, in a small way, in the adventure of a lifetime, writing a letter in the Torah. The young boy stood in veneration as he pointed to letters and watched the sofer, with his practiced hands transform the drops of ink into beautiful black letters that glistened on the parchment. The boy stood staring at his letter that had just been inscribed for eternity. Then in all seriousness he turned to the sofer. "Rabbi," the young boy began. "This is awesome!" He pondered a moment and finally spoke. "Can I ask you a question?" "Surely!" smiled the learned scribe, thinking about the historical or halachic questions the boy would propose.

"Good!" the boy beamed. And then in all innocence he proceeded to ask, "Do you do birthday

parties?"

We must understand greatness with the innocence and purity of a small boy who is tired of magicians and clowns entertaining at parties. He knew that there is no greater party than one filled with greatness itself. And greatness comes not in the form of balloon-filled ballrooms that will burst the aspirations of the participants. Distinction is not Titanic-themed dance floors that leave the participants with a sinking feeling. And Judaism's high aspirations will not flourish through hockey-themed Bar Mitzvahs that leave children questioning their true goals in life. Rashi understands the words "great party" with a Torah vision of greatness. Great party's participants enlighten and inspire. Great celebrations glorify the greatness of the Creator through the blessings He bestowed upon His humble revelers. You can have a wild party with wild times. And you can have a joyous party with jubilant music. But in order to have a "great party" you need "great people".

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