

**AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps**  
*Torah Portion – Vayera*

**Justice and Prayer**

**SOURCE:** Teach us rabbi: If I am riding along on a donkey and the time for prayer arrives, what should I do?

This is what the Sages taught: If you are riding along on a donkey and the time for prayer arrives, dismount [and pray]. And if you cannot dismount because you are distracted by worries about the safety of the money you have in your baggage, or you are afraid for your safety, pray while you are riding.

Rabbi Yohanan said: We learn from this teaching that a person should be mindful and undistracted during prayer before God.

Abba Shaul said when a person prays with concentration and direction (*kavanah*), that person's prayers will surely be answered, as it says, *You will direct their mind and You will listen to their prayer...* (Psalms 10:17)

And nobody had *kavanah* in their prayer like our Father Abraham, which we see from the fact that he said: *Far be it from you to do a thing like that!* (Genesis 18:25)

[Midrash Tanhuma, Hayyei Sarah #1]

**COMMENTARY:** The prooftext for Abraham's exemplary concentration and intention during prayer – his *kavanah* – is unusual, since it is not a verse from a prayer, but a verse from an argument that Abraham is having with God! Here is the full context:

*Then God said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin is so grave! I will go down and see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note."*

*Then the men [who were visiting Abraham] went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before God. Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will you wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the fifty innocent who are in it? Far be it from you to do a thing like that! To bring death upon the innocent and the guilty, so that the innocent and the guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge all the earth deal justly?"* (Gen. 18:20-25)

**QUESTION:** Why do you think that Abraham's words are treated by the midrash as prayer? How does this change the way you define prayer? The way you define *kavanah* in prayer?