

## Angel, Merchant, Prophet, Doctor (Vayera)

*I love people who make me laugh. I honestly think it's the thing I like most, to laugh. It cures a multitude of ills. It's probably the most important thing in a person. -Audrey Hepburn*

Three angels in the visage of merchants visit the campsite of Abraham. The recorded discussion is extremely brief (Genesis 18:9,10). The angels inquire as to Sarah's whereabouts, Abraham responds that she is in the tent, and then they proclaim the joyous and incredulous news that at the same time next year, 90-year-old Sarah will give birth to a son.

Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1475-1549) asks a simple question. Why did the angels need to come and deliver their prophecy? Just a few days and verses earlier (Genesis 17, verses 16,19 and 21) God directly informs Abraham in unequivocal terms regarding the impending birth, the timing, and even the name – Isaac.

Sforno, back in the 1500s, provides a surprising, and what might appear in his continuation as a medically advanced answer: the angel's reason for visiting Abraham's household and proclaiming their prophecy, was to make Sarah happy. The Torah indeed reports to us the immediate reaction to the angel's therapy (Genesis 18:12): Sarah laughs at the wild and unlikely news.

Sforno continues with a line that would please a modern psychotherapist: the happiness of the pregnant mother will lead to a healthier baby. It would be interesting to discover if this was a common belief of Sforno's time, or if he was unique in this viewpoint. Seeing as Isaac lived to the reported ripe old age of 180 years, these angelic doctors seemed to know what they were doing.

Like our forefathers before us, may we always strive and succeed to be happy and healthy in body, in mind and in spirit.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

*Dedication*

*To Batsheva Scheinfeld, Yudi Scheinfeld, and their parents, for their wonderful hosting.*