

# וַיֵּרָא

# Vayeira

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18:1 | א:ח'

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וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה' בְּאֵלְנֵי מַמְרֵה  
וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם

*G-d appeared to him in the plains of Mamre,  
and he was sitting at the entrance of the  
tent when the day was hot.*

## *Do You Feel an Urge to Be Kind?*

The Torah tells us that on the third day after Avraham's circumcision, "G-d appeared to him... and he was sitting at the entrance of his tent when the day was hot."

The Torah makes a point of telling us about the extreme weather conditions at the time of this episode because, as Rashi explains, "G-d took the sun out of its sheath so as not to trouble Avraham with visitors." Nevertheless, Rashi continues, "When G-d saw that he was troubled that no guests were coming, He brought angels to him in the likeness of men."

According to Rashi's explanation, G-d caused that day to be unnaturally hot in order to spare Avraham the burden of

entertaining visitors, but this unnatural absence of guests ultimately anguished Avraham. Did G-d's plan go awry? Was His interference with the normal weather a waste? Of course not. Clearly, although the plan was successful, as Divine plans always are, something changed that turned the absence of guests from a convenience into a source of distress.

What caused that change for Avraham? The answer lies in the words of the verse: "G-d appeared to him."

Avraham was instinctively generous. Being kind and hospitable to people in need came naturally to him. Yet even Avraham's generous spirit was stimulated only when he knew or saw someone in need. Therefore, in the absence of a situation requiring his attention, such as when the unbearable heat kept all travelers from passing through his area, Avraham was able to rest and recuperate from the circumcision he had undergone a few days earlier. G-d's plan worked out to a T.

But things changed for Avraham when G-d appeared to him. G-d's immeasurable kindness, revealed to Avraham on that day, evoked within Avraham an even greater spirit of generosity than before. Mirroring G-d's benevolence, Avraham became filled with such drive and motivation to be kind and giving that the lack of passerby suddenly became a terrible source of anxiety, and he desperately wished he could find someone with whom to share.

Sensing his anguish, G-d granted Avraham's new desire: "He lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing beside him..."

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 5, pp. 329–330, fn. 99*

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 18:2 | יח:ב
 

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וַיִּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים  
 נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיִּרְא וַיִּרָץ לְקָרְאָתָם

*He lifted his eyes and he saw,  
 and behold, there were three men standing beside him,  
 and he saw and he ran toward them.*

## *The Basics of Hospitality*

In Parshas Vayeira, Avraham interrupts a visit from G-d Himself in order to host three passersby (angels disguised as travelers). This teaches us the tremendous value of the mitzvah of *hachnosas orchim*, hosting guests. Per the Rambam:

This is the tenet that our patriarch Avraham established, and the path of kindness that he followed. He would feed wayfarers, provide them with drink and accompany them. Showing hospitality for guests surpasses receiving the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, as is written: ‘He saw, and behold, there were three men.’<sup>1</sup>

Yet considering that Avraham’s guests were actually angels, who had no need for the food and drink he offered, did Avraham actually fulfill the mitzvah of *hachnosas orchim* with this act of hospitality? In hindsight, it seems that Avraham disturbed his meeting with G-d for guests who do not even qualify for *hachnosas orchim*!

From here we see that *hachnosas orchim* is defined primarily by the heartfelt concern that the host shows for his guests’ wellbeing, and not by the accommodations he provides (in

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1. Mishneh Torah, Hil. Avel 14:2.

which case the extent of the beneficiary's need would be relevant). Although other acts of kindness too are certainly better with a smile than without, yet the ideal way of giving charity is actually when the donor and recipient never even meet face to face.<sup>2</sup> Not so the mitzvah of *hachnosas orchim*, where the fulfillment of this mitzvah is first and foremost through showing your guests your *personal* and sincere concern for their comfort and wellbeing.

Thus, regardless of whether the angels visiting Avraham needed or ate the food that he prepared for them, Avraham fulfilled the mitzvah of *hachnosas orchim* to the fullest with the care *he exhibited* toward them. Moreover, knowing (better than anyone) just how much Avraham was cherished by G-d, the guests too could appreciate the sincere interest this great man took in them, putting his meeting with G-d on hold in order to provide them with food and to escort them on their way.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 25, pp. 76-78

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2. Mishneh Torah, Hil. Matnos Aniyim 10:8.

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 18:1 | א:ח'
 

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וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵה  
וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם

*G-d appeared to him in the plains of Mamre,  
and he was sitting at the entrance of the  
tent when the day was hot.*

## *Judging by the Weather*

In the midst of conversing with G-d, Avraham sees three men approaching and runs to welcome them to his home. From Avraham's behavior we learn that welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Shechinah, the Divine Presence.<sup>3</sup>

But, having no precedent from which to learn, how did *Avraham* know that it was permissible to welcome human company during his reception of the Divine Presence? Was he not concerned that such behavior was inappropriate and disrespectful to his esteemed Guest?

Avraham's conclusion that it was permissible to welcome guests in the midst of meeting with G-d was based simply on the weather. Rashi notes that it was unusually hot that day, as G-d sought to spare Avraham the trouble of welcoming guests: "G-d took the sun out of its sheath so as not to trouble him with visitors."

Noticing G-d's interference with the weather patterns, Avraham realized what was going on. He wondered: if a meeting with G-d may not be interrupted to welcome people into your home, then what need is there for Divine intervention

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3. Talmud, Shabbos 127a.

to keep the passersby away right now? From the fact that G-d “took the sun out of its sheath” even *while* appearing to Avraham, in order to prevent guests from disturbing him, Avraham deduced that if guests *would* pass by, it was obviously still a mitzvah to welcome them even if it would disturb his meeting with G-d. Hence, concluded Avraham, welcoming guests must be greater than receiving the Shechinah! So when three men approached during G-d’s visit, “He [Avraham] saw, and he ran toward them...”

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 25, p. 82, fn. 45*

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 18:27 | י"ח:כ"ז
 

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וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא הוֹאֲלֹתִי  
 לְדַבֵּר אֶל ה' וְאֲנִי עָפָר וְאַפֵּי

*Avraham answered and said,  
 "Behold, now I have begun to speak to G-d,  
 although I am but dust and ashes."*

## *A Legacy of Dust and Ashes*

As a reward for our patriarch Avraham having said, 'I am but dust and ashes,' his descendants merited to receive two commandments: the ashes of the red heifer, and the dust that is mixed with water for a *sotah*.<sup>4</sup>

These two mitzvos correspond to more than just the metaphor of "dust and ashes" that Avraham used to describe his humble existence. The red heifer and the *sotah* water reflect the essence of Avraham's conduct, which he expressed with the words "I am but dust and ashes."

With these words Avraham effectively described the motivation behind his life of selflessness: his utter humility. Avraham was so insignificant in his own eyes that he felt certain that everyone else was surely entitled, equally or more, to the goodness with which he had been blessed. In fact, Avraham did not hesitate to help another person even when it might have caused him personal harm or loss. Thus, saving his nephew from captivity warranted risking his own life in battle;<sup>5</sup> tending to the physical needs of travelers whom he

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 4. Sotah 17a.

5. See Bereishis 14:1–24.

imagined to be pagan nomads justified forfeiting his time with the Divine Presence.<sup>6</sup>

As a reward, Avraham's descendants, the Jewish people, were given two mitzvos that exemplify this attribute of selflessness—the ashes of the *parah adumah*, the red heifer, used to purify those who contract impurity from a corpse; and the *sotah* water, used to prove the innocence of a suspected adulteress.

By Divine decree, all who were involved in preparing the ashes of the *parah adumah* contracted a degree of impurity themselves. Similarly, the preparation of the *sotah* water required erasing (into water) the ink of several verses from the Torah, including G-d's holy name. A Jew's ability to allow himself to become impure in order to spare someone else the inconvenience of impurity, or to actively desecrate G-d's holy name in order to save someone else's marriage, is truly the legacy of Avraham, who put all others before himself, viewing himself as nothing "but dust and ashes."

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 25, pp. 79–83

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6. See Bereishis 18:1–4 and Rashi ad loc.

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 כב:ב | 22:2
 

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קח נָא אֶת בְּנֶךְ אֶת יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתָּ אֶת יִצְחָק  
וְלָךְ לֶךְ אֶל ארְצֵי מוֹרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה

*Please take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go away to the land of Moriah and bring him up there for a burnt offering.*

## *Sacrificing Your Faith for Your G-d*

To knowingly give up your life runs contrary to the basic human instinct for survival. Yet our history is filled with *kedoshim*—holy martyrs who chose to die rather than submit to a belief contrary to the Torah. Chassidus explains that they drew their strength from Avraham, who “opened the channels of self-sacrifice,”<sup>7</sup> enabling his descendants to access the soul’s supernatural ability to part with life itself for the sake of sanctifying G-d’s name.

But people of other faiths, too, have sacrificed their lives for their beliefs. What makes Avraham’s sacrifice different?

Martyrdom on its own can be driven by a desire for rewards promised in the afterlife, or by a feeling that life without following your beliefs is not worth living, both of which are motivated by the desire to *improve* one’s current state of existence. Avraham’s spirit of self-sacrifice, however, was unique: not only was he ready to give up his *life* for G-d, he was ready to surrender his entire sense of identity and purpose of existence for G-d.

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7. See Sefer Hamaamarim 5678, p. 283.

Avraham had dedicated his life to propagating his belief in One G-d, Creator of heaven and earth, contrary to all the pagan beliefs of his time. Avraham's willingness to sacrifice his *own* life to stand by his convictions, one could argue, was not in defiance of his identity—it was his very purpose in life! To sacrifice Yitzchak, on the other hand, especially with no one around to witness it, would not further this belief but defeat it. It would extinguish any hope that the belief system that had been Avraham's *raison d'être* would be passed along to future generations. This was truly a sacrifice of everything that Avraham lived for.

Therein lies the singularity of Avraham's self-sacrifice, and consequently his descendants', which was evident in the Akeidah, the Binding of Yitzchak. In the act of the Akeidah, Avraham demonstrated that his self-sacrifice was not driven by hopes of achievement or even spiritual gain; it was motivated solely by his unbreakable devotion to G-d's every command.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 20, pp. 74–77;  
*ibid.*, vol. 18, p. 322

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 22:14 | כב:יד
 

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וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא ה' יִרְאֶה  
 אֲשֶׁר יֵאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר ה' יִרְאֶה

*Avraham named that place “G-d shall see,” so it is said to this day: On the mountain, G-d will be seen.*

## *A Seat for G-d, a Stage for Mankind*

After the Akeidah, the Binding of Yitzchak, Avraham named the mountain upon which it took place “G-d shall see.” As Rashi explains, this name reflected Avraham’s wish that “G-d shall choose and ‘see’ [i.e., identify] this place to be for Him, to cause His Divine Presence to rest therein and for sacrifices to be offered here.”

Avraham’s prayers were granted. G-d chose the location of the Akeidah for the *mizbeiach*, the altar in the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple. The Beis Hamikdash would be both the epicenter of Divine worship, “a house for G-d, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within it,”<sup>8</sup> as well as the place where G-d would “be seen,” perceived by all the pilgrims on the holidays.<sup>9</sup>

These two themes in the Beis Hamikdash reflect the two principles of Jewish belief and worship that the episode of the Akeidah established. Firstly, “From this action [the Akeidah]... all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of G-d.”<sup>10</sup>

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8. Mishneh Torah, Hil. Beis Habechirah 1:1.

9. See Shemos 23:17 and Talmud, Chagigah 2a.

10. Moreh Nevuchim 3:24.

Secondly, the Akeidah “informs us of the degree to which the prophets are certain about their revelations from G-d in prophecy... Avraham agreed to offer his only and beloved son as he was commanded, even though this command came in a dream or a vision... He would not have done so if he had even the slightest doubt about the vision’s veracity.”<sup>11</sup>

The designation of the place of the Akeidah as the stage for Divine *worship*—the sacrifices that were offered on the *mizbeiach*—corresponds to first theme of the Akeidah: the *devotion* to G-d’s will that Avraham inspired in the world through his readiness to sacrifice his son at G-d’s request.

The establishment of the site of the Akeidah as the primary seat of G-d’s future *revelation* to humankind corresponds to the second aspect of the Akeidah: the faith in G-dly *revelation* through prophecy that was confirmed by Avraham’s confidence that the command to sacrifice his son, which he heard prophetically, was indeed the word of G-d.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 30, pp. 73–74*

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11. Ibid.