

THE SECRETS OF THE SOUL

by Rabbi Label Lam

And HASHEM appeared to him in the Orchards of Mamre and he was sitting by the opening of the tent in the heat of the day. And he lifted his eyes and behold three men were standing by him and he saw them and he ran to greet them from the opening of the tent and he bowed down to them to the earth. And he said, "My Lord if please I find favor in Your eyes please do not pass by from Your servant!"
(Breishis 18:1-3)

To W(w)hom was Avraham Avinu addressing his words, to HASHEM or to the three wayfarers or both? The practical difference in knowing helps us determine whether or not the word for "My Lord" is a Holy name or not? Can it be erased when correcting a Sefer Torah or is it referring to HASHEM and dare not be altered. Another practical issue emerges based on the opinion that the word for "My Lord" is Holy and Avraham was in fact speaking to HASHEM. The Talmud states the following principle, "It is greater to be a host to guests than to receive the Divine Presence!" (Shabbos 127A)

Talk about moral audacity! On the third day after his circumcision at the age of 99 years, Avraham is sitting at the opening to his tent scanning the horizon for guests when G-d Himself comes to visit. This can only be described as the height of the heights of human experience. It doesn't get much better. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in The Path of the Just writes, "Man was only created to rejoice in HASHEM and to enjoy the rays of His Divine Presence, and this is the true pleasure and the greatest delight from all the delights that one can find!"

Noticing that Avraham is more discomforted by the absence of guests than by his medical condition, HASHEM provides three wanderers that are quickly passing by. What does Avraham do? He briefly excuses himself, putting HASHEM on hold with the MUZAK, while he busies himself feeding these three heat stricken strangers. Wow! From here we learn that it is greater to play the host than to receive even the Divine Presence!

This principle we learn from the behavior of Avraham Avinu! Fine! The question is: "Where did Avraham learn it from?" I once heard the following answer to that question: The verse states, "He saw and he ran to greet them..." His feet went instinctively! His initial impulse especially after the Bris was considered already correct. His perfected body was not an interposition between his G-dly Soul and its desire for generous action. No! He was so refined to the degree that his physical body was not less than a rubber glove worn by a skilled surgeon or as the nimble fingers of a concert pianist. The intentionality of his action is easily expressed in an unimpeded fashion through the vehicle of his earthly limbs.

Perhaps the proof of this thesis is that by the Binding of Isaac the verse records concerning Avraham, "And he sent out his hand and he took the knife to slaughter his son..." Ultimately we know that HASHEM did not want him to slaughter his son but only to be willing to deliver him. Therefore we are told that "he sent out his hand to take the knife". When I pick up my coffee in the morning I don't need to send my hand consciously. It goes automatically because I am thirsty. Since Avraham's instinct was already presumed G-dly, he therefore needed to force his hand into action.

Lest we be misled to believe that we ought to obey our feet, no, Avraham was different. We need to train our limbs like a child practices musical scales to reach the musicality within. We dare not over-trust our gut or we'll end up at the mall or worse. We require a sophisticated Code of Law to navigate life affectively and to acquire, as Avraham, those habits of action that access the secrets of the soul. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.