

THE BEAUTY WITHIN THE SHADOWS

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Hamaayan / The Torah Spring
Edited by Shlomo Katz

Vayera

Volume XV, No. 4
20 Marcheshvan 5761
November 18, 2000

Today's Learning:

Yevamot 3:5-6

Orach Chaim 334:12-14

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nazir 32

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bava Metzia 34

The midrash relates that as Avraham, Yitzchak and two servants traveled to the as yet unspecified site of the akeidah / the binding of Yitzchak, Avraham saw a cloud hovering over a distant mountain. Avraham recognized that this cloud was a sign from Hashem as to where Avraham should take his son to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham then asked Yitzchak, "What do you see?"

Yitzchak answered, "I see a beautiful mountain with a cloud hovering over it."

Next Avraham asked the two servants what they saw. They answered, "We see a barren wasteland."

To this Avraham responded (Bereishit 22:5), "Stay here by yourselves with the chamor / donkey while I and the lad go until koh / there." The midrash elaborates, "Stay here by yourselves for you are like a chamor / donkey, whereas I and the lad will go on in fulfillment of the verse, "Koh / thus [like stars] will your offspring be."

R' Yitzchak Yaakov Reines z"l (1841-1915; Rosh Yeshiva in Lida and founder of the Mizrahi) explains: Avraham wanted to know whether his son Yitzchak could see the light that shines through the darkness of exile and martyrdom. Yitzchak could see; he told his father, "I see a beautiful mountain. True, there is a cloud hovering over it, but the dark shadow of that cloud does not detract from the beauty that I see."

In contrast, Avraham's servants couldn't share Yitzchak's world view. All that they could see was a dark, barren wasteland. Avraham therefore consigned them to the world of the chamor, symbolic of the chomer / materialism which obscures from some people's view a proper understanding of the world.

Avraham and Yitzchak, both of whom could see the beauty within the shadows, left behind the materialistic servants and went "until koh" - to the fulfilment of the verse, "Koh / thus will your offspring be." Those who can see the beauty within the shadows even as they go to their martyrdom are the true stars that shine, as Hashem had promised Avraham. (Ohr Chadash Al Zion, Part VI, Ch. 2, p. 107b)

"He was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." (18:1)

Why, of all the acts of kindness that Avraham did in his life, does the Torah tell us only about the kindness that he did for angels, who did not need his kindness? Also, why was Avraham unhappy when he did not have guests? If no one needed his kindness, he was excused from performing the mitzvah at that moment!

R' Shlomo Heiman z"l (Rosh Yeshiva in Baranovitch, Poland and in Torah Voda'ath in Brooklyn; died 1944) explains that Avraham's purpose in performing acts of kindness was two-fold. One purpose was, of course, the kindness itself. The second purpose was to teach others the importance of doing kindness.

It is true that if no one needed his kindness, he was excused from performing the mitzvah at that moment. However, he was unhappy because he longed for opportunities to share his teachings with the world. The Torah emphasizes Avraham's desire to teach others to do kindness by telling us that he did kindness for angels. As long as his guests looked like humans, people would believe that Avraham was performing acts of kindness and would learn from him.

R' Heiman added: Sometimes a person is tired and feels that he will not learn anything if he attends a shiur / Torah lecture that day. One should go anyway, because, like Avraham, a person should be conscious of two benefits that can arise from his mitzvot. When one attends a shiur, he may learn something, but even if he doesn't, he sets an example for others. And, this latter purpose is accomplished even if he is too tired to understand the lecture. (Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Baranovitch p. 240)

"I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may sustain yourselves . . ." (18:5)

Rashi comments: We find a source in each part of Tanach for the fact that bread sustains man. The source in the Torah is the above verse. The source in Nevi'im / Prophets is the verse (Shoftim 19:5), "Sustain your heart with bread." The source in Ketuvim / Writings is the verse (Tehilim 104:15), "And bread will sustain the heart of mankind."

R' Asher Kalman Braun z"l (a rosh yeshiva in the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Lithuania) asks: Doesn't everyone know that bread sustains man? He answers: The fact that man is sustained when he eats bread is anecdotal evidence but it does not prove that bread can sustain any person. The fact that it is written in Tanach, however, is proof! (Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Shai La'Torah p. 420)

"He took cream and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed these before them . . ." (18:8)

Rashi observes: But he did not bring bread, because the bread that Sarah had prepared had become tamei / ritually impure, whereas it was Avraham's custom to eat only food that was tahor / pure (not the same as "kosher").

R' David Soloveitchik shlita (son of the "Brisker Rav") asks: So what if it was Avraham's custom to eat only food that was tahor! He believed that his guests (the angels) were idol worshipers, so why couldn't he feed them bread that was tamei?

R' Soloveitchik answers: It would appear that a host who feeds his guests does not fulfill the mitzvah of hachnassat orchim / hosting guests unless he eats with them. It is told that R' Chaim Ozer Grodzenski z"l (Vilna; died 1941) was ill one year and did not eat in the sukkah. One day, a visitor came, and R' Chaim Ozer invited him to stay for lunch. Much to the visitor's surprise, R' Chaim Ozer then donned a heavy coat and went down to the sukkah. He explained, "Although one who is suffering is exempt from the mitzvah of sukkah, he is not exempt from the mitzvah of hachnassat orchim." It is possible that R' Chaim Ozer's meaning was in consonance with the foregoing halachah.

The original question is not fully answered, however, for it would appear that even one whose custom is to eat only food that is tahor may eat non-tahor food when he is hosting guests (see Rema, Yoreh Deah 112:15, and Shach, para. 26). Why then did Avraham not serve the non-tahor bread and eat with his guests?

R' Soloveitchik answers: Rambam (Maimonides) writes (at the end of Hilchot Ma'achalot Assurot), "Even though one is permitted to eat food in an impure state and drink liquids in an impure state, the early pious ones used to eat even non-holy foods in a state of purity. [\"Holy foods\" means sacrifices and terumah. \"Non-holy foods\" means everything else.] These people were called 'perushim' / 'those who restrain themselves.' We are taught that 'perishut' / 'restraint' leads to purification of the body from evil deeds, and purification of the body leads to holiness of the soul and distancing

oneself from bad beliefs."

Mishlei (19:2) says, "Also, for the soul to be without knowledge is not good." R' Soloveitchik's grandfather, R' Chaim z"l, explained this verse in light of a letter that Rambam wrote to a correspondent saying that the question that the correspondent asked in his letter smacked of heresy and was not becoming of the one who asked it. Therefore, Rambam surmised, the questioner must have inadvertently eaten something non-kosher, which led him to ask such a question. This is the meaning of the verse -- even if one has eaten something unfit "bli da'at" / "without knowledge," it is "nefesh lo tov" / "not good for the soul."

In short, R' David Soloveitchik concludes, Avraham was halachically permitted to eat non-tahor bread with his guests. However, Avraham's life's work was to rid the world of heretical beliefs, and he would not put that work at risk by eating something not tahor. (Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Shai La'Torah p. 421)

R' Mordechai Meltzer (Kletzki) z"l

R' Mordechai Kletzki was born in Vilna in 1797, one year before the death of the Vilna Gaon. R' Mordechai married the daughter of R' Laib Gordon, who was in the malt business and was thus known as "Meltzer," and this name eventually stuck to R' Mordechai as well. Supported by his father-in-law, R' Mordechai devoted himself to studying and teaching, first in the yeshiva of R' David Strashun and later as head of Reb Maile's yeshiva. (Reb Maile was a wealthy businessman who established and supported the institution that bore his name. That yeshiva still exists in Yerushalayim under the name "Yeshivat Ramailles.")

In 1852, R' Mordechai was appointed rabbi of Kalvarie, Lithuania, and he remained there until 1864. In that year, at age 67, he was appointed rabbi of Lida. As a rabbi, he was known for being uncompromising in his principles, even if those who disagreed with him were the most powerful members of his flock.

It was R' Mordechai's policy not to write *haskamot* / letters of approbation for new Torah works unless he felt that the work was truly groundbreaking or important. Thus, when R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen sought R' Mordechai's *haskamah* for his work on the laws of *lashon hara* entitled *Chafetz Chaim*, R' Mordechai refused.

The author of the *Chafetz Chaim* left disappointed, and he soon met one of the judges of R' Mordechai's *bet din* / rabbinical court in the street. The latter inquired what had brought the visitor to Lida and the "Chafetz Chaim" told him. "Yes, he is a difficult man," the judge said of the rabbi, and began speaking *lashon hara* about R' Mordechai, but the Chafetz Chaim interrupted and argued the one must judge R' Mordechai in a positive light.

The judge was awestruck, and he ran to tell R' Mordechai about this young author who insisted on

judging R' Mordechai in a positive light despite his own disappointment. "If so," said R' Mordechai, "he must have written his work [on the laws of slander and gossip] with pure intentions," and he hurried to recall the author and wrote a glowing *haskamah* for his work.

R' Mordechai passed away in 1883 and was buried in Lida.

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