

A GLIMPSE OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Lord appears to Avraham at a very strange time. He is convalescing from his surgical circumcision; the day is very hot and it is high noon; and he is apparently looking for human company as he sits at the entrance to his tent. And even though he does espy three strangers and invites them in, the Lord, so to speak, interrupts this happening by appearing just then to Avraham. He is left conflicted as to which of his meetings he should give precedence to.

The rabbis deduce from Avraham's behavior that greeting and hosting human guests even takes precedence over communicating with the Divine Spirit! But the fact that such a juxtaposition of events occurs at the same time is itself a great lesson in life and faith.

The Lord appears to people at strange and unpredictable times. To some it is in sickness and despair. To others it is at moments of joy and seeming success. Some glimpse the Divine in the beauty and complexity of nature while others find their solace and epiphany in the halls of study and in challenges to the intellect. Since we are all different in nature and outlook, the Lord customizes His appearance to each one of us to fit our unique circumstances.

Thus people experience their own sense of spirituality and connection to their inner essence and to their Creator differently and at different moments in their lives. Some are frightened into such an experience while others enter into it with serenity and confidence. But we can certainly agree that there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to dealing with our souls and the eternal One.

The Lord appears to Avraham at the moment of his hospitality and tolerance towards strangers. In the tent of Avraham and Sarah, creatures can enter as Bedouin Arabs covered with desert dust and leave refreshed as radiant angels. It is in the service of others and in the care for the needs of others that the Lord appears in the tent of Avraham and Sarah. It is in the goodness of their hearts that the Lord manifests His presence, so to speak, to Avraham and Sarah.

Every one of us has traits and a nature that defines us. Just as chesed - goodness, kindness, and care for others - defined Avraham and Sarah, so too are we defined by our concerns, habits and behavior. And it is within that background that the Lord appears to each of us individually, if we are wise enough to recognize His presence, so to speak.

The prophet Yirmiyahu teaches us that in times of trouble and sickness the Lord appears to us "from afar." But, nevertheless, He appears to us. The great Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk was asked: "Where can one find God?" He answered in his usual direct fashion: "Wherever one is willing to allow

Him to enter." The performance of the acts of Torah and goodness, the bending of our traits and will towards service and concern for others, are the means by which we will glimpse the Divine presence within ourselves and in our homes - in health and contentment.

Shabat shalom,

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com