

# PARSHAS VAYERA

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari*

We can understand the Divine revelation to Avraham contained in the verse, 'And behold three people attended upon him' (Bereishit, 18: 2), in the light of the verse in Yechezkiel, 'I looked and behold! A stormy wind came from the north, a great cloud, flashing fire and a brilliance [noga] surrounding it' (1:4). The Zohar sees the first three as representing the three forces of complete impurity [klipot tumal], while the noga that revolves, represents that which the righteous turn into kedushah while the evil ones make it tamei. All three of the cardinal sins, idolatry, bloodshed and sexual immorality flow from these three klipot. The stormy wind, as the Zohar explains, is turbulence that disrupts the body and leads to bloodshed' (Section 2: 199). The great cloud spreads darkness over the mind leading to idolatry; idolatry being an intellectual error. Sexual immorality flow from the flashing fire, even as we read in Kiddushin (81a), 'a fire in me'. Baal HaTanya explains that noga are those areas of permitted actions in which we have choice as to how we perform them. Tzadikim who fulfill, 'in all your ways, know Him', turn these permitted actions into holiness but the reshaim act contrarily thereby creating evil. For example, economic activity is permissible within parameters that disallow fraud, theft or exploitation, yet the righteous do not limit themselves only to these parameters. They impose on themselves actions that flow from acknowledging that HaShem provides for all their needs, going beyond the letter of the law and performing acts of righteousness with their possessions.

The three mitzvot of the brit milah come to correct and cure the three major sins. 'Chituch', comes to correct sexual immorality- the great fire, as it removes the orlah, the priah comes to correct idolatry, as it reveals this error, and the 'atifat dam', comes to correct the sin of bloodshed, that is the great wind. Avraham through the brit was able to correct all three of these sins and this is reflected in Chazal's understanding of the roles of the three men who came to visit him and their part in the Divine revelation. The Midrash tells us that the three who came to Avraham were the angels Michael, Gavriel and Raphael. Yet there is another midrash that teaches that the three were a sailor, a merchant who dealt in food and produce, and an 'aravi', that is in the language of Chazal, a desert nomad. We can combine these two midrashim so that Michael, who is the sailor who guards water that guarantees life, that is chesed that is the merit of Avraham. Gavriel who is the merchant and that is the merit of din as we learn in Tosaphot Yomtov ( Berachot, chapter 3, mishnah 3); we say Elokeinu in the Birchat HaMazon as the produce of the world is allocated through justice. Din is the merit of Yitschak. Raphael, who is the 'aravi', from the word 'learbev', to mix, and this is Yaakov who is the mixture between Avraham's chesed and the din of Yizchak. Avraham through the merit of his brit

milah, was granted this threefold revelation. However, his ability to transform darkness into light through bringing the world back to recognize G-d, achieved the additional revelation of Noga.

Avraham receives the Shechinah while he is seated at the entrance to his tent (Bereishit, 18: 10). There is an important difference between revelation that is granted to a prophet while seated and that when he is standing. We know that the difference between the prophecy of Moshe and that of all the other prophets, is that theirs required preparation, while his required no preparation, 'stand up and hear what Hashem will command you' (Bamidbar, 9:8). The denseness of human materialism is a partition that separates a person from the spiritual and prevents them from receiving the revelation of prophecy. The great Master Menachem Mendel of Kotsk taught that the verse (Devarim, 5: 5) 'And Anochi [Moshe] stood between HaShem and You [Israel] ' means that the 'Ani', the ego, stands between Mankind and HaShem. Therefore, they need a suitable preparation before revelation can devolve upon them. However, since the whole body of Moshe was spiritually refined and purified, he did not need any preparation and prophecy devolved on him at all times. The text that sometimes sees Moshe as standing before Hashem (Devarim, 10: 10) and sometimes as being seated ( Devarim 9 : 9 ), differs from that used with regard to other prophets (Eliyahu, 1 Kings, 17 : 15 . And Elisha 2 Kings 3: 14), which talks only about 'standing before Hashem. This is because 'to stand' refers to a state of preparation for an action, whereas to be seated is a passive state. So Avraham, after the milah was able to receive revelation without preparation when seated as in the verse above. However, our sages teach us in Megillah (21a) that softness is represented through standing while hardness is seated, since that which is higher is more refined and softer than that which is low down. With Avraham this type of prophecy received while seated was only a temporary state and later he reverted to the status of the other prophets, as we read, 'and he [Avraham] still stood before Him' ( Bereishit 15 :23)

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