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Path

To Follow

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362

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOSPITALITY (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

From this week's parsha the Sages learn that "hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the Shechinah" (Shabbat 127a). While the Holy One, blessed be He, was speaking to Abraham in a prophetic vision, he saw three men approaching him. What did he do? He apologized, as it were, to Hashem and interrupted the vision so he could run out to these men and invite them into his home.

One may ask how Abraham could have possibly rejected the tremendous opportunity of "welcoming the Shechinah" in order to deal with matters of hospitality. True, showing hospitality is a great mitzvah, but does it approach the level of welcoming the Shechinah? Anybody can practice hospitality, but only a few exceptional people are ever granted prophetic visions.

Another question is whether it was appropriate for Abraham to have acted in the way that he did. While the Holy One, blessed be He, was speaking to him in a prophetic vision, Abraham said: "My L-rd, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass away from Your servant" (Bereshith 18:3). He then left and ran after his guests! Now imagine that someone important is speaking to you. Would you suddenly cut him off in mid-sentence and say, "Sorry, but I have some guests to attend to now. We'll continue this conversation at some other time"? Obviously, it would be impolite to suddenly leave while he is speaking so you can go and welcome some guests. How much more is this true if we were speaking with the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He! We shall soon understand, however, how Abraham's actions were justified. The situation is like that of a king who had a fisherman among his royal servants, a man who was responsible for catching and cooking fish for him. One day this fisherman was sitting by the water for a long time, but had caught nothing. He began to wonder what he would do if he didn't catch any fish that day, for what could he prepare the king to eat? While he was immersed in thought, the king himself came by and spoke with him. He was obviously honored that the king had taken the time to do this, but during their conversation the fisherman suddenly felt a heavy tug on his net, for a large fish had finally gotten caught in it. What was he to do – continue his conversation with the king, or cut the conversation short in order to haul

in the fish? Since he was a wise servant, he focused his attention on hauling in the fish, but asked for the king's forgiveness. He said to him, "Sire, the only reason that I'm here is to catch fish and serve you the kind of food that you love. I now have the opportunity to provide you with some exquisite fish, and I'm only interrupting our conversation to do my work. It's not because of a lack of respect on my part. On the contrary, it testifies to the immense respect that I have for your Highness, for I'm prepared to forgo the great delight of speaking with you in order to honor you."

When the king heard this, he praised the fisherman's wisdom by saying: "Not only am I not upset with you, I'm going to greatly reward you for having focused all your energies on honoring and satisfying me."

Abraham had been deeply immersed in a prophetic vision, for the King of kings was speaking with him. Yet in the middle of this conversation, Abraham perceived that he had some guests, and he knew that the greatest way that a person can honor the Creator of the universe is to follow His ways and emulate Him. That is, just as Hashem is merciful, a person should also be merciful, and just as Hashem demonstrates generosity, a person should also demonstrate generosity. Here Abraham had an opportunity to do just that, thereby bringing satisfaction to the Creator.

The fact that Abraham brought guests into his home and offered them food and drink not only represented generosity of the material kind, but of the spiritual kind as well. The Sages say that Abraham provided food and drink to everyone who entered his home. Then as they were about to leave and wanted to thank Abraham for his generosity, he would say to them: "I'm not the one you should thank, but rather the Master of the universe, for He created the food that you ate and the water that you drank." Thus by his hospitality, Abraham's guests began to have faith in the Creator. Therefore when Abraham decided to leave his personal discussion with the Holy One, blessed be He, not only did this not represent a lack of respect, it also demonstrated his great reverence for Him!

The Sages have also said that man is greatly loved, for he was created in the image of G-d. Nevertheless sinners tarnish this image on their countenance. When Abraham invited guests to his

home, he restored this image to them by teaching that they should have faith in Hashem and by converting them. The Sages derived this from the verse, "The souls they made in Haran" (Bereshith 12:5), from which they learn that "Abraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women." Abraham was therefore completely devoted to honoring this Divine image in man. If this was true for all normal demonstrations of hospitality, how much more was it true when Abraham was ill and suffering on the third day after his circumcision, for he ran in the heat of the day and neglected his pain and weakness in order to show hospitality to wayfarers! What exactly did he see? He saw three men who looked like Arabs, and not only Arabs, but idol-worshippers! In fact when they entered his tent, Abraham brought them water so they could wash their feet, for he was afraid that they worshipped the dust of their feet (see Rashi on Bereshith 18:3). Despite all this, Abraham put a great deal of effort into welcoming these guests, for he clung to the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He, Who sustains the entire world, even if it contains sinners and rebels. Hashem does not say, "Those who have sinned will not receive food or water from Me." Instead He demonstrates patience with them, awaiting their repentance until the day they die. Abraham therefore emulated the conduct of his Creator by drawing people closer to Him. Abraham did not check or evaluate them, nor did he ever lose hope that they would eventually recognize the truth, namely that there is a Creator Whom we must serve. In fact this is precisely what motivated people to come under the protective wings of the Shechinah, for they saw a stranger going to great lengths in order to provide them with food and drink in copious amounts and with a smiling face. Therefore when Abraham told them to bless Hashem after they ate, they truly believed that there was a Creator Who ruled the world.

This is why Abraham said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Please do not pass away from Your servant." He was not neglecting G-d's honor by leaving this prophetic vision. On the contrary, he was running to honor G-d and walk in His ways. He was running to do good, to bring men closer to G-d, and to restore the Divine image to them. Now that was honoring G-d!

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

So the Children May See

It is written, “He took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the youth” (Bereshith 18:7).

Rashi comments, “To train him to perform mitzvot.”

Abraham strived to perform the great mitzvah of hospitality with his own body and by himself. He didn't ask for any help from Eliezer, even though he was the overseer of his home and responsible for ensuring that everything functioned properly. Abraham was old and even sick at the time, yet he was intent on doing everything himself. The Sages say that a mitzvah is greater when a person performs it himself, rather than through an agent (see Kiddushin 41a), hence Abraham personally did all that he could for his guests. Nevertheless, there was one thing that Abraham gave to someone else to do, for he took a calf and gave it “to the youth.” Exactly who was this boy, and why did Abraham forgo his usual custom in order to make him enthusiastically perform this mitzvah? The boy, in fact, was his son Ishmael, for Abraham wanted him to participate in demonstrating hospitality in order to educate him in observing mitzvot!

The Shalom Yehuda recounts an instructive story on this subject. The Badatz (Beit Din) of the Jerusalem Edah HaCharedit was about to send some shochatim (ritual slaughterers) abroad in order to prepare a great quantity of meat that was to be imported to Israel. The members of the kashrut committee were unsure whether to have the meat salted abroad and imported already kasher (which would raise the price for consumers), or to leave it up to consumers to salt the meat themselves. In the latter case, however, the meat would have to be frozen immediately after slaughtering took place, for Halachah states that if three days have passed since an animal has been slaughtered, yet its meat has not been salted, it can no longer be salted at that point and is therefore forbidden to eat. The only way around this is to freeze the meat immediately after slaughtering takes place, for in that case it can be salted once it has thawed. Of course this method is, in principle, not the best solution, for three days will have passed without the meat being salted. Nevertheless there are lenient opinions within Halachah that allow this procedure in urgent cases. The members of the kashrut committee went to see the Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, who lived in Jerusalem at the time, and asked him this question. Actually, the expression on their faces clearly showed that to them this was really not an issue, for they were certain that the Brisker Rav would say that they could not freeze the meat first and then salt it. After all, was it possible to be indulgent in matters of kashrut and to rely on lenient opinions solely because of financial considerations? They simply wanted to propose this solution so their minds could rest easy. Yet to their great surprise, the Brisker Rav replied that the meat should be frozen before being salted, and that consumers should salt it themselves.

The Brisker Rav explained that the impetus behind this solution was not economic, but rather educational. That is, if the meat were to be imported already salted, then how were girls to learn how to salt meat by themselves, since they would not see their mothers doing the same? Hence he said that the meat could be frozen before being salted, so that girls could see their mothers salting it at home.

A Pearl From the Rav: Education Above All

It is written, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may observe the way of Hashem, to do righteousness and justice” (Bereshith 18:19).

Every person must be extremely careful with regards to their children's education. They must ensure that nothing taints their souls, for that is liable to make them spiritually stumble. Even if parents later repent, they

will only be able to repair the damage done to their own body and soul. They will not be able to repair the harm done to their children's souls, and they face the grave possibility of raising morally corrupt sons and daughters. This is why everyone must pray in abundance so as not to stray, and that no flaws cling to their offspring.

Scripture tells us, “Train the youth according to his way” (Mishlei 22:6), meaning that we should provide our children with a new path in the service of Hashem, a path not influenced by our own mistakes. As such, our children will not inherit our own mistakes, nor will they descend to the abyss. Instead they can undertake a new, balanced path in the service of Hashem.

In fact the numerical value of the words, “Train the youth according to his way” is the same as the expression, “In order that it go well with you and your children after you forever” (Devarim 12:28).

An Ally's Word of Advice

It is written, “Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre” (Bereshith 18:1).

Rashi states, “[Mamre] was the one who counseled him about circumcision. Therefore He appeared to him [Abraham] in his [Mamre's] territory.” We may ask why Abraham asked Mamre for advice, since the Holy One, blessed be He, had given Abraham a clear order to circumcise himself. In other words, there was no reason to ask for anyone's advice on the subject!

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin Zatzal explains that like Aner, Eshkol and Mamre were Abraham's allies. Thus if any of them were involved in a struggle or battle, Abraham would have to come to their aid, since that is the meaning of an alliance. Now that Abraham was about to put himself in danger by undergoing circumcision (and therefore be unable to participate in battle for a certain time), he felt the need to inform his allies and obtain their approval. Yet not only did Mamre not object to Abraham's circumcision, he actually encouraged him! Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared to Abraham on Mamre's territory.

– MiShulchan Gavoha

An Example of Hospitality

It is written, “He was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day” (Bereshith 18:1).

The Sages teach that when the Holy One, blessed be He, saw that Abraham was troubled over not having any guests, He sent him angels in the guise of men.

We need to understand why Abraham was troubled by the fact that he had no guests, since the mitzvah of showing hospitality is not obligatory when guests are not present. Furthermore, what benefit would Abraham have from demonstrating hospitality to angels, since the mitzvah does not apply in that case? After all, angels do not need to eat, drink, or rest! The answer is that Abraham's desire to demonstrate hospitality stemmed from two sources. Besides the fact that he wanted to feed the hungry, Abraham also wanted to demonstrate an example of hospitality to others so they could learn to do the same. He therefore wanted to do so in this case, although there was no obligation to perform the mitzvah. Although no wayfarers presented themselves on that day, the duty to teach hospitality to others was still on Abraham's mind, a duty that he could fulfill even with angels. They looked exactly like human beings, and whoever saw Abraham showing them hospitality would learn to do the same.

From here we also learn a lesson regarding Torah study in our day. Whoever feels compelled to participate in learning Torah within a group does two things: Besides the fact that he is learning Torah (which is tremendously important), he also positively influences others to take an interest in Torah. Therefore if he happens to be beset with problems that draw his attention away from learning Torah, he should nevertheless

refrain from doing so. Even if his Torah study is not as good as it should be, the secondary objective – exerting a positive influence on others through a love for Torah – still applies.

– Chiddushei Rabbi Shlomo

Being Generous, But Not at the Expense of Others

It is written, “Let a little water be brought” (Bereshith 18:4).

It is surprising to read that while Abraham offered his guests all kinds of things (bread, butter, water, veal), he still said: “Let a little water be brought.” Of all things, why did he skimp on water?

We can understand this in light of a story told about the gaon Rabbi Israel Salanter Zatzal. While staying at someone’s home, he went to wash for netilat yadayim. However he used an extremely small amount of water, and everyone was wondering why he didn’t use more, since the Sages say that one who washes his hands with copious amounts of water merits wealth and comfort. Rabbi Salanter replied that he didn’t want to make it difficult for the servant girl – who had to draw and carry any extra water for washing – since servant girls are usually orphans or widows.

Abraham acted in the same way. He ran to get everything that he offered to his guests, and he supplied them with food in abundance in order to honor them. However someone else carried the water, as Rashi tells us, and therefore Abraham told his guests to take “a little,” for we have no right to be generous at the expense of others.

– Darchei Mussar

A Depraved Culture

It is written, “There is but no fear of G-d in this place, and they will kill me on account of my wife” (Bereshith 20:11).

Near the start of the Nazis rise to power in Germany, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman was invited to speak to students at the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin. Among other things, he said: “The expression, ‘There is but no fear of G-d’ is surprising, for it seems to suggest that other things were fine and good. This teaches us, however, that Abraham saw many wonderful things in the country – advanced education, culture, and arts – and only one thing was lacking: The fear of G-d. Yet when that is missing, all others values are worthless. In that case, there is every reason to believe that ‘they will kill me.’ ” It was then, in 5695, that Rabbi Elchanan foresaw that this “enlightened” western culture would transform itself into a country of savage animals.

– Ohr Elchanan

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha covers the main events in the life of Abram upon his becoming “Abraham” through circumcision (detailed in the previous parsha). Hashem revealed Himself to him on the plains of Mamre as he sat by the entrance of his tent. Three visitors came to him, one of whom announced the birth of a son to Sarah “at this time next year” (Bereshith 18:10). Two angels then went to destroy Sodom and its surroundings while saving Lot, who initially fled to Zoar. He subsequently departed with his daughters and lived in a cave in the mountains. From the plains of Mamre, Abraham traveled toward the Negev and settled in Gerar, where Sarah was taken to Avimelech’s house and eventually released. Abraham prayed for Avimelech’s household, since Hashem had made them all barren. Hashem also made Sarah fertile, and she gave birth to a son. Sarah told Abraham to separate her son Isaac from the son of her servant Hagar, and to drive both him and his mother from their home. At that time Avimelech entered into a pact with Abraham at Beersheba, where Abraham planted a tamarisk. It was also there that Abraham (who lived among the Philistines for a long time) called upon the Name of Hashem. Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, and from there he returned to Beersheba. Finally, Abraham was told that his brother Nahor had fathered children, among them Bethuel, the father of Rebecca.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Correct Way to Pray

It is written, “Abraham rose early in the morning to the place where he stood [amad] before Hashem” (Bereshith 19:27).

Prayer is the only mitzvah that is described by the term amidah (literally “standing”). As the Sages say, “Amidah refers to prayer” (Bereshith Rabba 68:9). Yet where in the term amidah is there an allusion to prayer? Is the essential meaning of prayer not missing in this term? The Alei Shur writes, “The Amidah alludes to the complete cessation of daily life. It contains the true meaning of prayer. In fact it is prayer; the word amidah always designates prayer. We stand, neglect everything else, and turn to the right place.”

“The word amidah always designates prayer,” and there is nothing else called amidah (“standing”). Have you ever seen someone standing? All progress in life consists of walking and advancing. We are always headed somewhere, always moving toward fulfilling some goal in life. Who is the person whose feet can take him places, yet he decides to stand in place? This is why the word amidah always designates prayer, for prayer is the only time that we refrain from the incessant movement of life by taking a time-out. We separate ourselves from the street, withdrawing from it and standing in place. We stop, face a wall, and close our eyes. We neither see nor hear, but simply concentrate on addressing the One Who moves everything – the Creator of the universe – and we pray to Him.

As a place of prayer, the synagogue is characterized by an atmosphere of amidah. “And in Hashem’s holy place, the whole earth was silent before Him” Shhhh...be quiet! Here the clamor of life cannot make its way inside, for here a world within a world is created. The world within the synagogue is different, as if time itself has stopped. Here we stand in prayer.

There are many synagogues that are found in the heart of the city, directly on the bustling street. Chaos surrounds these synagogues, and the sound of prayer is mixed with the sound of merchants selling their wares, with the sound of music or trucks in the background. All this makes for an atmosphere that is not conducive to prayer. On the street, life never stops. This world and the World to Come border one another. In this way we approach the essential goal of prayer, of the Amidah, which is separating ourselves from the world and cleaving to the Creator of the universe.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

An Assembly of Scoffers

Scoffing brings misery upon the world. It becomes difficult for people to earn a living, and everyone is punished because of the scoffer, as the Sages have said: “He who scoffs brings destruction upon the world” (Avodah Zarah 18b). It is forbidden to scoff even in passing, and if we see scoffers and remain in their presence – even if we do not join them – this too is a transgression. Thus it is written, “Who did not sit in the company of scoffers” (Tehillim 1:1). The Sages have taught, “One who cleaves to sinners, even though he does nothing like them, is punished along with them.” We must leave their presence so as not to learn from them, and instead we must seek to associate with those who speak words of Torah. We will then be happy in this world and in the World to Come.

– Shmirat HaLashon

A TRUE STORY

Fewer by the Minute

It is written, "What if ten would be found there" (Bereshith 18:32).

Soon after the start of World War II, when Russian forces took control of Lithuania, serious transgressions of Jewish law began to occur in the city of Kovno. Many Jews rejected their established way of life and joined the ranks of the communists, who had taken over the region.

The Rav of Kovno, the gaon Rabbi Avraham Dov Kahana Shapira Zatzal, said: "Our father Abraham asked the Holy One, blessed be He, to spare Sodom from destruction, and he began by asking, 'What if there should be 50 righteous people in the midst of the city?' With that he proceeded to ask, 'What if the 50 people should lack five? Would You destroy the entire city because of the five?' He then asked the same question concerning 40, 30, and 20 righteous men, until he arrived at 10. This is surprising, for Abraham was completely aware of the situation in Sodom. Did he have to guess at something that he was well aware of, namely that there weren't many righteous men remaining in Sodom?"

Rabbi Avraham continued: "Now that Sodom was about to be destroyed, however, there was little time left. If there were 50 righteous men in Sodom, there would very soon be 40, then 30, 20, and 10. Corruption was spreading at an alarming rate, and the number of righteous men was diminishing by the minute. If just recently there were 40, there was now but 30, and soon there would be 20, 10, and finally none at all. The city of Kovno is headed for terrible destruction, and a spiritual earthquake is about to strike. If yesterday we could still see a person arriving in synagogue as usual, today he wouldn't even venture inside. His friend no longer observes Shabbat, and so on. Everyone is abandoning the camp, and there is no longer a guardian to protect it."

– MiShulchan Gavoha

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Avraham Yishayahu Karelitz – The Chazon Ish

The Chazon Ish, whose yahrtzeit occurs this week, was at home one Shabbat deeply immersed in studying the holy Torah. Outside, in the nearby woods, a regiment of soldiers was engaged in shooting exercises. As the sound of bullets echoed through the region, a thought suddenly occurred to the commander: Perhaps the sound of the bullets was frightening the Chazon Ish, who wouldn't know where they were coming from. He might even think that it was the sound of war making its way to his home, and that he was in grave danger. The commander immediately decided to make his way to the home of the Chazon Ish and reassure him. When he arrived, he found the Chazon Ish crouched over his books and studying intensely. The noise that pervaded the region was unable to disturb the Chazon Ish's deep concentration, and he had simply not heard the sound of explosions or gunfire. The commander hesitatingly approached the Rav and gently said to him, "Kevod HaRav. Don't worry about the sound you're hearing. It's not enemy gunfire, but exercises from our own soldiers." When the Chazon Ish heard that, he was stunned: "Those are our soldiers firing? In that case, I'm really starting to get worried! Our soldiers are firing on Shabbat without reason! Their lives aren't in jeopardy, and they're doing this as an exercise? You're putting us all in danger! If our enemies were out there firing, I wouldn't worry because I have faith in the verse, 'Hashem is your guardian, Hashem is your protective shade at your right hand.' However if Jews are desecrating Shabbat, then they might provoke Hashem to remove His protection from us, for all Jews are responsible for one another. Now I'm really starting to worry about our safety!"

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTARAH

It is written, "A woman from among the wives of the prophets" (2 Kings 4:1).

The woman who cried out to Elisha, saying that her husband had died and left her without support, was the wife of the prophet Ovadia. Elisha told her to collect as many empty containers as she could, and to pour oil into them. A miracle then occurred, for as long as empty containers remained, the jug from which she poured the oil did not run dry. Elisha stipulated one condition for the miracle, namely that the woman was to shut the door behind her and her sons (v.4). The miracle of the oil, which the woman was to use in sustaining her household, had to occur behind closed doors, far from prying eyes. Why? Rashi states that it is not fitting for a miracle to take place before everyone, for miracles are supposed to occur discreetly.

Why discreetly? It would seem that on the contrary, everyone should see a miracle, for in that way a great sanctification of Hashem's Name will take place among the masses!

The Ohr Yechezkel states that because the present world was created in darkness, we cannot clearly see that Hashem created the world and constantly maintains it. As such, people have the choice to do what is good in the eyes of G-d, or on the contrary to sin. If a person chooses to do good, he will be rewarded for it. This would not be the case if people were to constantly witness miracles and wonders, for then they would no longer have free will. They would be compelled to perform mitzvot because they would clearly see the Creator's hand in this world. In that case they would no longer merit a reward. Hence Elisha told the woman to close the door behind her so that others would not witness the miracle. They could then continue to confront the evil inclination, which would cast doubts into their hearts and make them question whether they should believe in Hashem or not. Thus when their good inclination takes the upper hand and they begin to believe in Hashem, they will merit a great reward.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Education from Childhood

A man was in synagogue during the holidays as Hallel was being recited. His son was next to him, and everyone responded after Hallel. The man's son, however, was saying foolish things. The congregants said to the man, "Look at your son – he's acting foolishly!" The man replied, "He's only a child. Let him have some fun!" This occurred during all eight days of the holiday, for he did not reprimand his son at any time. Every year thereafter, a member of that man's family died, including the man himself, his wife, his child and grandchild. In all, 15 people died from that entire family, until there remained but two people, one who was lame and blind, and the other who was simple-minded and cruel. – Menorat HaMaor

Rabbi Joshua ben Chanania once happened to go to the great city of Rome, and there he was told that there was a child in prison with beautiful eyes and face and curly locks. He went and stood at the doorway of the prison and said, "Who delivered Jacob to plunder and Israel to looters?" [Isaiah 42:24]. The child answered, "Was it not Hashem, He against Whom we have sinned? They did not wish to go in His way and did not listen to His Torah" [ibid.]. He said, "I am certain that this one will be a teacher in Israel. I swear that I will not move from here before I ransom him, whatever price may be demanded." It is reported that he did not leave the spot before he had ransomed him at a high price, nor did many days pass before he became a teacher in Israel. Who was he? He was Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha. – Gittin 58a

Concerning the prophet Elisha, we read: "He went up from there to Bethel. As he was going up on the road, some young lads came out from the city and mocked him, saying to him: 'Go on up, baldhead! Go on up, baldhead!' He turned around and saw them, and cursed them in the Name of Hashem. Two bears then came out of the forest and tore apart 42 of the lads" (2 Kings 2:23-24). Why did he do this? The Gemara states, "Rabbi Yochanan said, 'He saw that there was no sap of the commandments in them.' But perhaps there would have been such in their descendants? Rabbi Eleazar said, 'Neither in them nor in their descendants until the end of all generations'" (Sotah 46b).