
פרשת וירא

פרק יח פסוק ג

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-לֹהֵי אִם-נָא מְצֵאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינַיִךְ אֶל-נְאֻם תַּעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ:

חז"ל

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: גדולה הכנסת אורחין מהקבלת פני שכינה, דכתיב ויאמר א-
דני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבר וגו'. (שבת קכז.)

מושג

גְדוּלַּת הַכְּנֻסַת אֹרְחִים מִהַקְּבֻלַת פְּנֵי שְׂכִינָה.

Translation:

Inviting guests is greater than greeting Hashem's presence

Explanation:

Avrohom saw welcoming guests as a higher spiritual value than talking to Hashem. Avrohom was the first to recognize Hashem in the world, in nature. He also realized that more than any other place in nature, Hashem is found within man himself, since man was created in the image of G-d, בצלם אלקים. To Avrohom, welcoming guests was important because he saw within each guest a spark of Hashem¹. Therefore, welcoming guests and thereby finding Hashem where he is hidden - within man - is a greater accomplishment than seeing Hashem where he is clearly found. Also, a person becomes closest to Hashem when acting like Hashem, such as by doing acts of חסד.

Looking in the Pasuk:

While Hashem is paying a visit to an ailing Avrohom, the three מלאכים appear. Avrohom asks Hashem to wait for him² as he attends to his guests. Avrohom felt that welcoming his guests was more important than continuing his conversation with Hashem.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Avrohom Avinu interrupts his conversation with G-d to greet his visitors. Avrohom considered welcoming guests to be more important than speaking to Hashem.

Understand: Hashem is found in all of nature, most clearly within man who was created in G-d's image. Avrohom welcomed guests because he saw a spark of Hashem within them. To Avrohom הכנסת אורחים was a higher level of greeting Hashem, because he found Hashem even where He is hidden.

Think: Frequently words used by the Torah may carry multiple translations, leaving it up to the reader to use context for hints as to the Torah's intent, as well as to consider the possibility of layers of meaning.

1 See note #2

2 See note #1

NOTES

1. Rashi here alludes to a very interesting discussion that takes place in the Gemoroh as to whom Avrohom was talking when he says אל נא תעבור. The discussion centers on the question of who the word א-דני refers to. One would imagine that it would be obvious that we are referring to G-d, who is called by that name many times in Tanach. However it is not so simple. There are two major reasons to lead us to believe that the אדני here refers to the guests and not to Hashem. The first issue is the fact that it would seem rather strange for Avrohom to make such a request of Hashem. Secondly, in the previous Pasuk we have already read of Avrohom running to his guests to greet them. If he has already run to his guests would it not be too late to ask Hashem to remain? Therefore we find an opinion in the Gemoroh (שבועות לה:) which teaches that even though every other mention of אדני indeed refers to Hashem, this one is an exception as it refers to one of the guests:

כל שמות האמורים בתורה באברהם קדש, חוץ מזה שהוא חול, שנאמר: ויאמר אדני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך. However, our Musag is of the opinion that this name is קדש as well, that is, it also refers to G-d. This opinion is mentioned in the same Gemoroh:

חנינא בן אחי רבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה משום רבי אלעזר המודעי אמרו: אף זה קדש. כמאן אזלא הא דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב: (כמי הולך זה שאמר רב יהודה בשם רב) גדולה הכנסת אורחין יותר מהקבלת פני שכניה, כמאן? כאותו הזוג.³

According to our Musag it is not peculiar at all that Avrohom should make such a request of Hashem, quite the contrary it teaches us all a valuable lesson. As for the second question asked above, Rashi answers that Pesukim will frequently record something that actually took place previously in a later Pasuk⁴.

2. There are a number of interesting points of discussion regarding the lesson of our Musag. Firstly, why indeed is welcoming guests greater than meeting with G-d Himself? I would imagine that if one had merited to speak to Hashem directly that would certainly absolve him of any and all other Mitzvos⁵! Secondly, we may wonder how did Avrohom himself know that this was the right thing to do? After all, we have Avrohom's actions to guide us, but what guided Avrohom?⁶ Perhaps we might begin by asking why Avrohom sees הכנסת אורחים as such an important מצוה? Why does he open his tent to the four directions to make sure he does not miss any possible guest? Is

3 The Gemoroh attributes our Musag only to this opinion, because according to the first opinion it is altogether possible that Hashem had left Avrohom before he ran to greet the guests.

4 וְאֵף עַל פִּי שְׁפָתַיב אַחַר "נִיבְרַח לְקִרְאָתָם", הָאֲמִירָה קוֹדֵם לְכוּ הִיְתָה, וְדָרָךְ הַמְקַרְאֹת לְדַבֵּר בָּן. However, there is still a significant textual difficulty with this opinion. For the continuation of the dialogue, יָקָח נָא מֵעַט מֵיַם, reverts back to the visitors; making it very peculiar that the Pasuk should start with the visitors, switch to Hashem and then, without any hint, switch again back to the visitors. This difficulty will be dealt with at the end of Note #2.

5 One could argue that the law of המצוה פטור מן המצוה should apply here, completely absolving Avrohom of welcoming the guests.

6 I had the opportunity to ask this question to a second grade class in the Eitz Chaim school in Toronto. I received two brilliant (in my opinion) answers. The first was that Avrohom realized that the guests would leave if he did not attend to them while Hashem would always be there. The student was actually using the concept of מצוה עוברת vs. מצוה שאינה עוברת found in ברכות כה. and in קידושין כט: א. A second student answered that Avrohom realized that since the day was so hot it was not natural for guests to arrive (Rashi at the beginning of the Parsha (ד"ה כחם היום) quotes the Gemoroh in (פ:): בבא מציעא (פ:): which teaches that Hashem made the day hot so that none should trouble Avrohom. And, only after seeing that Avrohom was pained more by not being able to welcome guests than by the pain of his מילה did Hashem send the מלאכים to visit Avrohom.) and therefore if guests did appear, they must have been sent by Hashem. If Hashem sent the guests, Avrohom realized that Hashem must have wanted him to attend to them!

A Chassidik interpretation claims that a Tzaddik is so attuned to the will of G-d that his body will naturally 'know' what Hashem wants. Therefore, when caught in a dilemma as to what was the will of Hashem in this situation, Avrohom listened to his body. When he saw that his feet wanted to take him to his guests, he knew that this was the right thing to do. This interpretation fits beautifully into the Pasuk. וירא וירץ, he saw that his feet started to run and thus he knew to ask Hashem to wait. However, all the above answer only our second question, but do not deal with the question of why indeed greeting guests is the greater מצוה.

there any connection between the fact that Avrohom was the first to recognize the presence of Hashem in the world and his extreme care for this מצוה?

One possible answer is that this was Avrohom's way of being מקרב רחוקים. By inviting strangers into his home he was able to spread his monotheistic belief. However, this answer would assume there to be no inherent value to הכנסת אורחים and would claim that there is no מצוה if the people are already believers. This does not seem to be the case as we attach a tremendous value to this מצוה in all situations.

Rather, we might answer that the unique quality of אברהם אבינו was his ability to find Hashem in nature. He was the first who was able to look at the world and see a creator. This also gave him the ability to find Hashem in the most obvious of places: inside his fellow man. For man is created בצלם אלקים and therefore man is the most apparent of places to find the שכינה⁷. According to this, the tremendous importance that Avrohom attached to welcoming guests was because he considered each man to be a צלם אלקים, and therefore worthy of his hospitality.

Consequently, Avrohom did not see greeting Hashem and greeting guests to be contradictory; rather, they were complimentary, as he regarded both as a welcoming of the שכינה into his home. And, following his reasoning, welcoming guests would be even greater, as the ability to find the שכינה in nature is a greater accomplishment than finding the שכינה in the שכינה Itself.

According to this we may look at the Gemoroh quoted above (in Note #1) in a new way. We have already mentioned above that according to the opinion that Avrohom is talking to Hashem, there is a difficulty in the text in that the Pasuk asking Hashem not to leave is said after Avrohom has already run to his guests. Even if we use Rashi's explanation that the words אדני אל נא תעבור מעל were said before the words וירא וירץ, it is still very difficult to understand how the Torah continues יקה נא מעט מים, which switches again to the guests. Rashi's answer, brought in the previous note, only explains why I might find an early discussion in a later Pasuk, but it does not explain why it is inserted in *middle* of a different conversation!

Perhaps we might offer that the two opinions of the Gemoroh are not arguing as to whom Avrohom is talking. It is quite clear that Avrohom is talking to the visitors. However, what they are arguing about is when Avrohom called them אדני, did he mean to do so in a non-קדש way or in a קדש way. The first opinion states that even though the word is always קדש, here, given the context of the Pasuk, we must say that is an exception and is חול. The other opinion agrees that Avrohom is talking to his guests, but argues the word even here retains its קודש meaning. For when he used the word אדני-י he was talking not only to them but also to the שכינה he saw within them. Thus, Avrohom's welcoming his guests was in effect an enhanced version of קבלת פני שכינה, making every act of חסד into an act of true עבודת השם.

Another possible explanation, provided by my daughter Chasida, is that Avrohom realized that the greatest honor he could give to Hashem would be to emulate Hashem's actions. Thus it was obvious to him that Hashem would prefer for Avrohom to be גומל חסד as Hashem always does, rather than to stand there speaking to Hashem. In short, Hashem would rather you *act* like Him than speak to Him. That the ultimate religious experience is achieved through acts of חסד and not through prayer is a lesson that must be stressed.

3. Questions for further discussion:

Avrohom found G-d in nature because it was inconceivable to him that the world was without a design. Why do you think he found G-d in mankind?

Could Avrohom seeing the שכינה in each and every man be the reason he davened for סדום?

⁷ A powerful example of this is found in the Midrash which parallels the first 5 דברות to the the second 5. The commandment of ה' אנכי ה' לא תרצה parallels to the Midrash explains that killing man is tantamount to one who defaces a statue of the king.