Points to Ponder

Vayera 5779

**וַיֵּרָ֤א אֵלָיו֙ יְהֹוָ֔ה Hashem appeared to him (18:1)** – Why does this section begin with VaYera and not VaYomer as was with all of the instances before? The Midrash comments that this was after the Bris Milah which means that the relationship with Hashem changed (MeeBisari Echezeh Elokim). But what really changed after the Bris? Also, why not mention that he appeared to Avraham – why Eilav? **Rav Betzalel Rudinski Shlita** explained that in the same way a person is different than a Malach because he can still grow and change – whether as a baby at the time of Bris or even at 99 like Avraham at his Bris. This is a critical message provided to every man (not just Avraham) at the beginning of this week’s parasha. Moreover, this change is not only in word – Hashem literally appears to the one who makes these changes in his life BECAUSE he is ready to make those changes (maybe that is why the sun is a healing agent – as we are more like the moon and the sun and its stagnating heat are not able to grow and thus is subservient to our power too).

**וַיֵּרָ֤א אֵלָיו֙ יְהֹוָ֔ה Hashem appeared to him (18:1)** – **Ramban** notes the position of **Rambam** that the entire opening episode of this week’s Parasha from opening until after Avraham debates Hashem about not destroying Sodom was a Chizayon (some sort of dream). Not only does Ramban disagree, he rejects such a suggestion as against the truth of Torah as the opening words state that these things actually happened. **Rav Dovid HaNazir ztl**. notes that the Ramban’s strong opposition might be based in his Christian surroundings whereby he wanted to combat any thought that the Shechina could be split into three parts (as with the Chizyon of three malachim) while Rambam came from a Moslem environment and feared seeing the world split into demons and ghosts like the folk tales of the culture near him. Hence the debate. **Rav Uri Sherki** defends the position of Rambam noting that the fact that the Torah ends the episode with a recognition that Avraham got up early – does seem to suggest that there is room to argue that the preceding occurred while he slept. The debate moves on.

**וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֥ם אַבְרָהָ֖ם בַּבֹּ֑קֶר אֶ֨ל־הַמָּק֔וֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָ֥מַד שָׁ֖ם Avraham arose early to the place where he stood and greeted Hashem (19:27)** – It seems strange that at the moment when we are speaking about Lot’s plight and his flight from Sodom, we interrupt the story to tell us about where Avraham was. Why was this relevant? **Rav Tanchum Cohen Shlita** relayed in the name of **Rav Schachter Shlita** that the Torah is highlighting something important to us: While the daughters of Lot believed that they and their father were the last people on earth (hence the rest of the story), the Torah wants us to know the real truth – that they were only saved in the merit of Avraham, who went out to try to save even MORE people in the place he had debated Hashem. Similarly, their progeny would be fearful of Am Yisrael in the future and would try to curse us but that too was a mistake – because they also had nothing to fear --- Hashem had told us not to attack Ammon and Moav. It too, was not their Zechus but rather in the cards of Hashem that declared what the ultimate plan was supposed to be.

**וַיְהִ֞י כַּֽאֲשֶׁ֧ר הִתְע֣וּ אֹתִ֗י And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house (20:13) – Rashi** comments that **Onkelos “**writes as he does.” A glance at Onkelos lets us know that Avraham meant that when the nations of the world were mistaken and followed their own handiwork Hashem brought me close to Him. What does Rashi add with his comment? **Rav Meir Shapiro ztl.** explains that Onkelos deviated from his usual stress on the simple meaning of the words. Why? Because he was writing as he practiced. He too, was saved from the life of the Roman government. He saw the light and converted. Thus, he fulfilled that which he chose to use as his translation.

**וַיַּ֤עַשׂ אַבְרָהָם֙ מִשְׁתֶּ֣ה גָד֔וֹל Avraham made a big party (21:8) – Rashi** explains that the party was big because of the Gedolei HaDor – Shem, Eiver and Avimelech – who were there. **Rav Yerucham Levovitz ztl.** pointed out that what we call a big party today is based on numbers or on publicity. In the Torah, what makes a major party is the major personalities who attend. We see how we can check in on whether our perceptions check out with those of the Torah from little examples like this.

**כִּ֣י | עַתָּ֣ה יָדַ֗עְתִּי I now know that you are one who fears Hashem (22:12)** – It sounds like the Akaida taught us that Avraham served Hashem M’Yirah. Yet, it sounds like Avraham’s primary means of serving Hashem was through love? The **Steipler ztl.** explains that the Yirah described here is the Yirah of Romeimus (awe) which includes love too and both are achieved today through the study of Torah – both the written and the oral. Specifically, the Steipler encourages the study of Aggados because he who studies the aggados will have Yiras Cheit while those who do not, will not.

**וַיָּקֻ֛מוּ וַיֵּֽלְכ֥וּ יַחְדָּ֖ו אֶל־בְּאֵ֣ר שָׁ֑בַע They arose and they went together to Be’er Sheva (22:19)** – In the two earlier instance of the phrase Vayeilchu Shneihem Yachdav (that they went together) we learn valuable lessons about how Avraham went with an unsuspecting Yitzchak and went with the same heart and how Yitzchak figured out the purpose and still walked with the same heart as Avraham. What is the lesson of the third one mentioned here? **Rav Mendel Futerfas ztl.** explained that when Avraham went back to Beer Sheva with Yishmael and Eliezer, he carried no overt smugness that he was able to withstand the test that was the Akaida.

**Haftara: וּבָ֗את וְסָגַ֚רְתְּ הַדֶּ֙לֶת֙ בַּעֲדֵ֣ךְ וּבְעַד־בָּנַ֔יִךְ And you should go and close the door for yourself and your children** (Melachim II 4:4) – From **Rashi** it is apparent that the goal of this miracle was not in the publicity as much as in the message that Hashem saves. Hence, the door was to be closed during the miracle. Why then was the wife of Ovadiah permitted to have her children present? **Rav Yitzchok Lichtenstein Shlita** suggests that while there is an issue of Hester Davar in terms of the public in miracles like these, the opposite message is there for the children. Children are to know who their parents are, and what Zechusim they have in order for them to appreciate where they come from and their own relationship with the Ribbono Shel Olam. If Hashem was going to bring about a Yeshua for them via their parents, He wanted the children to know about it, about them and to grow.