

Avraham Avinu's Greatest Act of Hospitality

Avraham Avinu's Hospitality to the Angels

"וירא אליו ה' וכו' והנה שלשה אנשים"¹, 'Hashem revealed himself to him [Avraham] and suddenly three men appeared'. With these words, the Torah begins the narrative of Avraham Avinu's Hachnasas Orchim (welcoming guests).

Avraham Avinu waited outside on the lookout for guests despite the intense heat of the day and despite his pain which was at its peak after the Bris Milah. When he spotted what he thought were three people (they were really angels in disguise), he ran toward them, and begged them to allow him the privilege of having them as guests. He then slaughtered *three separate* calves in order to serve each guest his *own complete tongue!* Sarah, too, hurried to bake fresh bread for the company. Avraham Avinu personally waited on his guests despite his many servants.

The Mei Hashiloach points out a detail that is troubling. In his lifetime, Avraham Avinu welcomed countless people who actually enjoyed the food he served them, and thereby caused them to recognize the creator. Why does the Torah specifically recount the one episode where the guests were really angels and didn't enjoy the meal he fed them, to portray the extent of his Hachnasas Orchim?

The Mei Hashiloach ends off with the remark, 'This is very deep, this is very deep', but doesn't explain.

We will present a resolution to the above difficulty.

Was Sarah's Bread Served?

The verse begins the account of the meal, "ויקח חמאה וחלב ובן הבקר אשר עשה וכו"², 'He took butter, milk and the calves that he prepared etc'. Rashi comments, 'He didn't bring bread because Sarah became a Niddah and the dough became tamai (impure)'.

In the Midrash³ there are actually two opinions as to whether Avraham Avinu served the bread or not. One sage is of the opinion that Avraham Avinu did not bring the bread because it became tamai. The other sages maintain that he did indeed serve the bread.

How Could It Be That the Bread Wasn't Served?

The commentators on the Chumash have a difficult time explaining how it was permissible for Avraham Avinu to serve milk and meat to the angels at one time.

There are some who say that Avraham Avinu solved the 'Milk and Meat' dilemma by first serving the milk then the meat.

However the halacha (law) is, that it is necessary to 'wipe and rinse' one's mouth between eating the milk and meat. One of the sages in the Gemarah is of the opinion that this wiping can be accomplished only with bread⁴.

If the bread wasn't served, how could the angels have eaten the meat even though it was after the milk? They wouldn't have had a proper 'wiping' according to this opinion in the Gemarah.

Avraham Avinu's Reward for Serving Bread

Furthermore, the Midrash⁵ states that in the merit of giving his guests bread, Avraham Avinu's descendents received a great reward. In the wilderness, they ate the manna, a heavenly bread; in Eretz Yisroel, they were blessed with two of the special produces of the land, wheat and barley; and in the future, after the arrival of Mashiach, they will receive an abundance of very blessed grain.

This Midrash tells us that there was a 'bread food' that was served. According to the opinion that Sarah's bread wasn't served, what was served in its place?

The Afikomen

Rashi⁶ states that the day the angels came to Avraham was the first day of Pesach. The night before, Avraham Avinu had eaten a portion of Matzah for the Afikomen. There is a custom to save a piece of the Afikomen as a segulah (good omen) for security.

We may suggest that it was the leftover piece of the Afikomen that Avraham provided the angels with which to wipe their mouths. If so, it was in the merit of serving the angels from his Afikomen that Avraham Avinu merited that his children received the manna in the wilderness, wheat and barley in Eretz Yisroel, and will get an abundance of extraordinary grain in the future.

Therefore, אפיקומן, when we spell out each of the letters, א-ל-ף-פ-א-י-ו-ד-ק-ו-ף-ו-א-ו-מ-ם-נ-ו-ן is gematria (has the numerical value of) "7" לאכול מן עליהם מן לאכול⁷, 'And [Hashem] rained upon them Manna to eat' (they both equal 597). In the merit of the Afikomen that Avraham Avinu served his angel-guests, the angels, his children merited partaking of heavenly bread.

Fortifying the Angels before Their Crucial Task

The Angels stopped at Avraham Avinu's home on their way to execute a most critical mission that would affect world history. They were on their way to rescue Lot from the inferno that would soon be his city's fate.

Rescuing Lot and his daughters was much more significant than just saving the relatives of Avraham. Lot and his daughters contained within them the seed of Mashiach. The angels were on a mission to ensure the existence of Mashiach.

The Satan garners all of his strength to fight the emergence of Mashiach because that will spell his demise. The Angels needed special fortification before embarking on this fateful task in order to be able to overcome his hindrances.

The Wine of Mashiach

The daughters of Lot needed wine in order to intoxicate their father so that they should be able to give birth to the carriers of the seed of Mashiach. From where did they have wine in a cave somewhere on the outskirts of the smoldering ruins of Sodom?

Rashi states that it was divinely orchestrated that they have wine in order that they conceive these two nations. The Midrash⁸ tells us that the daughters of Lot merited a condition that will be during the time of Mashiach, when, "והיה ביום ההוא יטפו ההרים עסיס"⁹, 'and it will be in that day, the hills will drip with wine'. The mountain, underneath which they were hiding, dripped with wine of the future.

The daughters of Lot, conceived the nations that harbored Mashiach, using wine from the times of Mashiach...

The Greatness of the Afikomen

The Seder night is divided in half. The first half, until we eat the Afikomen, celebrates our redemption from Egypt. During the second half, we celebrate our future, ultimate redemption of. Spiritual lights that will then reign shine during the second half of the Seder night.

Early on in the Seder, we take out the middle Matzah and break it in half. The *bigger* half, called the Afikomen, is then אָפּוֹן, hidden away. We start the second, *bigger* half of the Seder with the eating of the Afikomen, the redemption that is, as of now, hidden.

The Afikomen is a food infused with the light of Mashiach. אָפּוֹן, the hidden Afikomen, is gematria, גּוּאֵל לְצִיּוֹן, a redeemer for Tzion (they both equal 226).

With the power of the Afikomen of Avraham Avinu, the Angels were able to rescue the hidden seed of Mashiach.

The Food of Angels

As spiritual beings, angels require spiritual sustenance. They receive this sustenance through the smoke that rises to heaven from the burning sacrifices in the Bais HaMikdash (Temple). Today, when there are no sacrifices because the Bais HaMikdash is destroyed, the Angels are sustained through our prayers that take the place of the sacrifices.

The Angels ate the food of Avraham Avinu in the manner that angels do. They burned the food, the same way they sustain themselves with the burning sacrifices.

During this entire episode, the Angels are referred to as אנשים, people. The only exception is when they exited Avraham Avinu's home. There they are referred to as מלאכים, angels. It is noteworthy that the letters of the word מלאכים are the same as the word מאכלים, food.

The angels left the home of Avraham Avinu fortified with the holiness of his food, to carry out their daunting task.

Answering the Question of the 'Mei Hashiloach'

The 'Mei Hashiloach' questioned why the Torah uses the episode of the Angels' visit to Avraham Avinu to portray the greatness of his Hachnasas Orchim, when in this particular case, the guests could not enjoy the food.

This answer is now easily understood. Is there a greater Hachnasas Orchim than feeding someone food that will empower him with such great spiritual strength? What Avraham Avinu did for his angelic guests was the greatest Hachnasas Orchim he ever did.

The Dual Tasks of Pesach

The Holiday Pesach contains two essential elements; the obliteration of Chametz, and the eating of Matzah.

With the destruction of Sodom, the Angels destroyed the Chametz which, on Pesach, symbolizes all powers of evil. They also ate the Matzah, the Afikomen of Avraham Avinu.

The Hidden Greatness of the People of Sodom

The 'Rabbeinu Bechaya' teaches that the villainous citizens of Sodom contained great Neshamos (souls) that had fallen into the Kelipos (powers of evil). They were actually reincarnations of the souls of the 'generation of dispersion' that had attempted to perpetuate their name by building a great city with a tower.

"¹⁰ואנשי העיר אנשי סדום", 'The people of the **city** were the people of Sodom'. The people who had said, "הבא נבנה לנו עיר"¹¹, 'let us build for ourselves a **city**', where reincarnated as the people of Sodom and the cities surrounding it.

The journey of these souls wasn't over with their sojourn as the citizens of Sodom and its suburbs; they ended up being part of the Jewish People. The congregation of Korach consisted of souls reincarnated from the area of Sodom.

"¹²ויתקח קרח", 'and Korach took', is translated by 'Targum Unkelos' as "ואתפלג קרח", and ואתפלג has the same root as דור הפלגה, the generation of dispersion. First Korach and his followers were part of the generation of dispersion, then the people of Sodom. Afterwards, they were elevated to be members of the Tribe of Levi, and carry the Holy Ark!

Saving the City of Tzoar

The edict of destruction was decreed upon Sodom and the four suburbs surrounding it. The city Tzoar was the smallest of these. It was saved in the last minute through the prayer of Lot.

In Parshas Lech Lecha, by the war between the Four and Five Kings, the city Tzoar and its king are mentioned. The 'Targum Yonoson' comments there,¹³ "ומלכא דקרתא דבלעת" 'דיירהא', 'The king of the city whose inhabitants were swallowed'. The King, the leader, of the souls of Tzohar, was Korach, who was swallowed into the ground.

Although Tzoar was saved at that time, through the prayer of Lot, the decree that they be swallowed into the ground like the rest of their neighbors still stood. What Lot accomplished was that he put it off for a later incarnation, when they were the congregation of Korach.

The Rectification of Korach

There is a disagreement in the Gemara¹⁴ whether the congregation of Korach will merit Olam Habah (the world to come).

One opinion is that although Korach did descend into Gehinom, he will eventually be lifted up from there. Upon the birth of the prophet Shmuel, a descendent of Korach, his mother Chana prophesized, "מוריד שאול ויעל"¹⁵, 'He lowers into the abyss, and he raises (from there)'.
The Arizal says the last letters of "צדיק כתמר יפרח"¹⁶, 'A Tzaddik will flourish like a date palm', spells קרח. In the end, he will be rectified to be Tzaddik.

Avraham Avinu entreated Hashem to rescue the cities of Sodom. It seems that his prayers weren't successful. However, it may be, that what Avraham Avinu accomplished was the ultimate rectification of Korach. Avraham pleaded, "חלילה לך"¹⁷, 'It would profane you!'. Rashi's comment on these words is puzzling, "לעולם הבא".

With the understanding that Avraham was praying for the ultimate spiritual salvation of the congregation of Korach, this Rashi sparkles with clarity.

It is fascinating to note that חלילה is an acronym for, "יש להם חלק לעולם הבא"¹⁸, 'they will have a part in the world to come'.

Avraham Avinu's prayer for the city of Sodom ultimately bore fruit in the eventual rectification of its inhabitants, Korach and his congregation.

The Impure Bread of Sarah

There is an opinion that Avraham Avinu did serve the angels the bread even though it was impure. According to the opinion that Avraham thought that they were Arabs, he definitely didn't have to be stringent and serve only food that was pure.

But even according to the opinion that he knew that they were angels, Avraham Avinu didn't refrain from serving them the impure bread because eating the impure bread of Sarah was not beneath them.

We have no grasp of the pristine purity of the tumah of a Tzaddik. Bread that became tamai through Sarah Emeinu (our matriarch), is holy of holies even for angels of heaven. The angels were very elevated through eating the tamai bread of Sarah. The spiritual sustenance that usually comprises their diet doesn't come close.

The Tumah of a Tzaddik

The 'Meor Einayim' (Shemos) teaches that sometimes a Tzaddik is compelled to descend to places of kelipah and tumah in order to raise neshamos that have fallen there.

Eating the *impure* bread of Sarah actually enabled the angels to raise the spark of Mashiach from the depth of Sodom.

Mashiach Will Raise Jews from the Lowest Depths

The final redemption will extend even to the lowest places and people.

There are fifty levels of impurity; the lowest of them is heresy. Today, the majority of the Jewish People are unfortunately mired in this filth. Mashiach will ensure the redemption of the Jewish People from even the fiftieth level of tumah.

"¹⁹לושי ועשי עוגות", 'knead and make bread', which refers to the bread that Sarah made and then became impure, is gematria "ובא לציון גואל ולשבי פשע ביעקב", 'a redeemer will come to Tzion and to those from Yaakov that repent from sin' (they both equal 1217). The impure bread of Sarah enabled the rescue of Mashiach and thus the ultimate redemption of even those stuck in the quagmire of פשע.

From Within the Depths Comes Greatness

In Sodom, there were people that were evil sinners to Hashem, yet they will eventually merit a portion in the world to come.

From Lot and his daughters descend two very lowly nations, Amon and Moav. Yet, within the Kelipah of these two peoples, lay hidden the seed of Mashiach.

Chanukah is Coming

This Parsha is read in the second half of Cheshvan. The second half of a month is connected to the coming month. The coming month is Kislev; the light of Chanukah is beginning to shine.

The Divine Presence never descends lower than ten handbreadths. However, Chanukah is the exception. We light the candles and draw the Divine Presence specifically below ten handbreadths. Why is it that specifically on Chanukah Hashem descends to us, as low as we may be?

Visiting the Sick

Usually, a person of lesser importance visits a person of greater importance. The Prophet Yeshaya had a Prophecy for King Chizkiyahu. However, the king wouldn't come to him, and since a prophet is greater than a king, Yeshaya did not want to visit King, either. Therefore, Hashem made King Chizkiyahu become ill and then Yeshaya visited him even though, as a prophet, he was greater.

When a person is ill, even people of greater importance than him descend from their position to visit him.

On Chanukah, Hashem Visits the Ill Jew in Exile

Chanukah is a Festival that retains a weekday character. Work is not forbidden and we don't wear Shabbos clothes. During the week, our soul is ill. חול, weekday, is similar to חולה, a sick person.

On Chanukah, the Divine Presence descends lower than usual in order to visit our souls that are ill during the weekdays and bestows upon us an aura from the healing light of Mashiach.

On this Shabbos, which ushers in the first rays of the Chanukah lights, our generation, tired from centuries of exile and spiritually ill, is visited by Hashem. Therefore, the Parsha begins with "וירא ה' אליו"²⁰, "And Hashem revealed himself to him [Avraham]". Rashi says on these words, "לבקר את החולה", 'to visit the sick'.

May we merit seeing the light of redemption,

אור חדש על ציון תאיר ונזכה כלנו יחד במהרה לאורו

¹ בראשית יח:א

² בראשית יח:ח

³ מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה מ"ח, סימן י"ד

⁴ חולין קה ע"א

⁵ מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה מ"ח, סימן י"א

⁶ בראשית יח:י

⁷ תהלים עח:כד

⁸ מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה נ"א סימן ח'

⁹ יואל ד:יח

¹⁰ בראשית יט:ז

¹¹ בראשית יא:ד

¹² במדבר טז:א

¹³ בראשית יד:ב

¹⁴ סנהדרין קח:א

¹⁵ שמואל א', ב:ו

¹⁶ תהלים צב:יג

¹⁷ בראשית יח:כה

18 סנהדרין פרק י' משנה א'
19 בראשית יח:
20 בראשית יח:א