

VAYEIRA (GENESIS 18:1-22:24)

Not Now, G-d, I'm Busy . . . I'll Talk to You Later!

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Imagine the scene. You have been selected for a visit from the President of the United States. The most powerful man on the planet is coming to speak with you. He arrives. He comes into your home and asks you how you are doing. During the conversation you happen to glance over the President's shoulder and notice three homeless vagrants walking up the path toward your front door.

How embarrassing! What should you do? You come up with a solution:

"Forgive me, Mr. President. I have something to take care of. Make yourself at home. I'll be back soon."

You then proceed to run to your itinerant guests, waiting on them hand and foot while the President cools his heels and leafs through your wedding album.

You give them your best food to eat and your finest cigars to smoke. All the while, the President stands there incredulously, flabbergasted by your audacious and outrageous behavior.

Pretty bizarre, right? Unheard of, right? Not at all! We're talking about Abraham!!

G-d appeared to him in the Plains of Mamre, as he sat in front of his tent in the heat of the day. (Genesis, 18:1)

Abraham was a 99-year-old man, recovering from surgery. (Circumcision) G-d was performing the Mitzvah of *Bikur Cholim*, visiting the sick.

Not a flesh-and-blood head of state. A visit from the King of Kings! A spirit of prophecy rested upon Abraham. He was in intimate contact with the Master of the World!

He lifted his eyes and saw three men . . . he ran from the front of his tent to greet them, bowing down to the ground. (verse 2)

But wait. Mustn't forget about Guest #1! *He said, "If I find favor in Your eyes, G-d, please don't turn away from your servant."* (verse 3) (In other words, "Forgive me, 'Mr. President.' I have something to take care of. Make yourself at home. I'll be back soon.")

Back to Guests #2, 3, and 4: *"...Let's get some water so you can wash . . . we'll get some bread . . ."* (Verses 4 and 5)

By the end of the visit, he had provided them with milk, cream, and (separately, of course) fresh beef. They blessed him and continued on their way, leaving Abraham to continue his long-delayed conversation with the Almighty.

Is this proper?! How could he have done such a thing?!

How could Abraham have been so insolent as to put G-d "on hold" so he could deal with three strangers? Granted, it's very nice to welcome guests into your home, but where were Abraham's priorities?

To fully understand the story, we have to back up just a bit. What was Abraham doing sitting in his doorway in the first place? If he was recovering from his Bris, he should have been in bed! What is the significance of, "*as he sat in front of his tent in the heat of the day*"? What has the temperature to do with it?

The Talmud (Bava Metzia, 86a) fills in some pieces of the puzzle. It was an unusually hot day. G-d had made it hot so that travelers would stay off the roads. Abraham used to look for guests. G-d has "*built a world of Chessed -- kindness*." (Psalms, 89:3) He created us FOR THE EXPRESS PURPOSE of being kind to each other. Abraham felt obligated to try to find someone who could benefit from his kindness and hospitality. By keeping the roads clear of travelers, G-d ensured that Abraham would get some much-needed rest. But it wasn't to be.

Abraham was distressed. How could the world exist without the opportunity to perform acts of kindness? He sent his servant Eliezer out to find guests. Eliezer returned empty-handed. Abraham couldn't believe it! It couldn't be! He had to look for himself.

Once G-d saw how pained Abraham was over his lack of guests, He dispatched three angels in the guise of men. Now Abraham would be able to do Mitzvahs!

Now Abraham was in his element. In spite of his age, in spite of his wounds, he RAN to assist his guests. He doted over them and saw to it that they were comfortable and well fed. And G-d waited. He waited for Abraham to finish. He wasn't insulted by being ignored. BECAUSE HE WASN'T BEING IGNORED!!

The Talmud observes, based upon this passage, that "*Hachnosas Orchim*, welcoming guests, is a greater Mitzvah than greeting the Presence of G-d." *Chessed*, kindness, is one of the pillars that support the world. We serve G-d by caring for His children. Abraham didn't realize that these men were angels. He thought they were fellow human beings in need of assistance. He saw them as a vehicle to get closer to G-d. He saw an opportunity to bring THEM closer to G-d. Abraham wasn't ignoring G-d; he was SERVING Him!

Prophecy is nice. Dialogue with G-d is an opportunity that is reserved for the privileged few. But it doesn't come close to the Mitzvah of helping others. If we find that surprising, it is only because we don't understand how important that Mitzvah is.

Let's look for a moment at the practical ramifications of this concept. My Rebbe, Rav Moshe Chait, (For information about my Rebbe, of Blessed Memory, [click here](#) and [here](#).) dean of the Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva in Jerusalem, made the following observation: Let us say one is *Davening*, reciting prayers. The *Amidah* (literally, "Standing,") is a prayer that is recited in silent devotion, with one's feet together, in total silence and deep concentration. What if a poor person walks by? Should I put down my prayer book and run to that person to help him? After all, as we said above, kindness is greater than talking to G-d! It would seem, based on the above, that we should interrupt our prayers to take care of others.

And yet, the rule is that we do NOT interrupt our prayers to give charity, etc. Why not? Why do we not allow the Mitzvah of *Chessed* to supersede the Mitzvah of prayer? Isn't it greater?

The answer, said my teacher, is that we are so far removed from fully understanding Torah values, that our *Chessed* is not true *Chessed* and our praying is not true praying. We are, unfortunately, not sufficiently sensitive to the sacred task that is expected of us. We simply don't appreciate how many opportunities we have to be holy.

The next time someone needs a favor, stop and think. Do I want to go about my business, too busy to be bothered by someone else's petty, mundane needs?

Or would I rather be holy?

Have a great Shabbos.

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