

Meshech Chochmah Parshas Vayeira

Two Calls from Heaven

וַיִּקְרָא מַלְאָךְ אֱלֹקִים אֶל הָגָר מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם

An angel of God called to Hagar from heaven (21:17)

First Call: Hagar in the Desert

One of the episodes in this week's parsha involves the sending away of Hagar and Yishmael from Avraham's house. Having lost her way and with the water in her flask having run out, Hagar collapses in despair. At this point, an angel calls to her and encourages her to continue, whereupon a nearby well is revealed to her.

This is not the first time Hagar has been sent away from Avraham's home, nor is it the first time she is addressed by an angel. A very similar event takes place in last week's parsha when Hagar, upon seeing that she conceived quickly, begins to denigrate Sarah. Sarah reacts harshly to this, leading Hagar to run away, whereupon she is met by an angel who tells her to return to Sarah's house. A significant difference between these two episodes is that, whereas on the first occasion, the pasuk¹ states that angel "found Hagar," i.e. appeared to her and approached her, in our parsha it states that he "called to her from heaven."

What is the behind these two different modes of communicating with Hagar?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that the shift in the way the angel spoke to Hagar reflects a shift which had taken place in Hagar herself. The first time Hagar was sent away she was told to return. This means that she still retained a basic affinity toward Avraham's house and the way of living that it represented. As such, she was yet deserving of having an actual encounter with an angel – something, as Rashi informs us, with which she was familiar in Avraham's house.²

The second time, however, Hagar was not told to return. Indeed, at this stage, she had lost her connectivity with Avraham's house and the way of living associated with it. This detachment on her part is reflected in the more detached way she

¹ Bereishis 16:9.

² See Rashi ibid. pasuk 13 s.v. *hagam*.

was addressed by the angel. He did not appear to her to communicate his message, but rather called to her from distance.

Second Call: Avraham on Har HaMoriah

In light of this explanation, it is most interesting to consider a second time in our parsha when someone was called by an angel “from heaven.” This occurs during the episode of the *Akeidah*. Just as Avraham is about to sacrifice Yitzchak on Har HaMoriah, the pasuk states:³

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי מְלֶאכֶּה ה' מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם... וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנֶּעָר

An angel of Hashem called to him from heaven... and he said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad.”

This situation is most perplexing. If, as we saw with Hagar, being called from heaven represents a certain detachment of the person from spiritual matters, why did it happen here? Surely, having attained the exalted level of being prepared to offer up Yitzchak, Avraham could not have been *more deserving* than this of an encounter with an angel! Why, then, did the angel call him from a distance?

The answer, says Meshech Chochmah, is that here, too, conditions did not allow for the angel to approach Avraham – because of Avraham’s exalted madreigah!

The Akeidah

In order to understand why this would be so, the Meshech Chochmah prefaces by referring to a statement of Chazal in the Midrash⁴ that at the time of the *Akeidah*, Avraham attained the status of Kohen Gadol. What is the meaning of this statement? While it was true that Yitzchak was to be offered as a korban, a regular kohen can also offer a korban. Now, it is true that a regular kohen is not eligible to offer another human being, but neither is a Kohen Gadol! What was it, then, about the *Akeidah* which involved Avraham attaining the status of Kohen Gadol specifically?

³ Ibid. 22:11-12.

⁴ Bereishis Rabbah 55:10.

We know that the one place where only a Kohen Gadol can enter and perform the avodah is the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom Kippur. The Midrash is thus informing us that the level of closeness with Hashem to which the *Akeidah* brought Avraham equaled and was equivalent to that of the avodah in the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom Kippur! That is why Avraham attained of Kohen Gadol at that time.

The Meshech Chochmah adds a further element here. The Gemara⁵ states that when it comes to the mitzvah of Shofar, the principle of “אין קטיגור נעשה סניגור – the prosecution cannot become the defense” applies. The Gemara further explains that although this principle also only applies in the Kodesh HaKodashim, it also applies to the mitzvah of Shofar, as “since it comes to evoke the remembrance [of the Bnei Yisrael], it is as if it is inside [the Kodesh HaKodashim].”

What event specifically does the mitzvah of Shofar evoke the remembrance of? The *Akeidah*!⁶ Therefore, the act itself which is the basis of the shofar’s “remembrance” all the more so has the status of being inside the Kodesh HaKodashim.

What does this have to do with the way the angel called Avraham?

With regards to the avodah of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, the pasuk writes:⁷

וְכֹל אָדָם לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּבֹאוֹ לְכַפֵּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ

No person shall be in the Ohel Moed (Mishkan) when [the Kohen Gadol] comes to achieve atonement

Commenting on this pasuk, Chazal state in the Yerushalmi:⁸

אפילו אותן שכתוב "פְּנִיָּהֶם פְּנִי אָדָם."

⁵ Rosh Hashanah 26a.

⁶ Ibid. 16a “Said the Holy One, Blessed is He, ‘Sound the Shofar before Me with the horn of a ram and I will remember for you the *Akeidah* of Yitzchak, son of Avraham.’”

⁷ Vayikra 16:17.

⁸ Yoma 1:5.

This includes even those concerning whom it is said,⁹ “Their face is the face of man” [i.e. angels].

Now we can understand why, at the time of the *Akeidah*, the angel called to Avraham from heaven. In total contrast with Hagar’s case where she not on a level which allowed her to be approached by angel; Avraham had risen to a level – that of Kohen Gadol in the Kodesh HaKodashim – which made it impossible for an angel to approach him!

⁹ Yechezkel 1:10.