

## פרשת וירא

Would anyone have been able to intuit the Halachah that appears at the beginning of our Parshas Vayera? Would anyone have thought to respond in consonance with what the Halachah is? Every reader can give their personal answer – and I can give mine. I would have said ‘preposterous’ and I could have ‘proven’ it as well.

What is the Halachah? What is the subject?

Three times in our Parsha we encounter the Mitzvah of הכנסת אורחים, providing hospitality to guests.

The first time, an event to which we will return shortly, is the opening subject of our Parshas Vayera.

We read (B’reishis Perek 18/P’sukim 2-5):

וַיֵּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיֵּרֶץ לְקִרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהֶם...נ...י<sup>1</sup> אִם נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ: יִקַּח נָא מִעֵט מִיָּמַי וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֵנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ: וְאָקְחָה פֶתַח לֶחֶם וְסַעַדוּ לְבָכֶם אַחֲרַי תַעֲבֹרוּ כִּי עַל כֵּן עָבַרְתֶּם עַל עַבְדְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן תַעֲשֶׂה כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:

Avraham raised his eyes and saw and behold three men were standing near to him and he saw and he ran towards them from the opening of his tent and he prostrated to the ground. He said, ‘My masters, if I please have found favor in your eyes, do not pass by me, your servant. A little water will be taken for you, please, and you will wash your feet and you will lean under the tree. I will take bread and you will feast your heart and then you will pass by – because that is why you passed by me, your servant’; they said, ‘Yes, we will do as you spoke’.

The second instance of hospitality is in a very different context whatsoever. This time, Lot is the host as we read (ibid. Perek 19/P’sukim 1-3):

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֹמָה בְּעָרֵב וְלוֹט יָשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר סְדֹם וַיֵּרָא לוֹט וַיִּקָּם לְקִרְאתָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אִפְּיָם אַרְצָה: וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא אֲדֹנָי סוּרוּ נָא אֶל בַּיִת עַבְדְּכֶם

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<sup>1</sup> The form in which we wrote this word and its translation into English will be discussed shortly.

וְלִינוּ וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּם וְהִלַּכְתֶּם לְדַרְכְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִי בְרַחוּב נָלִין:  
וַיִּפְצַר בָּם מְאֹד וַיִּסְרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֵּה וַיַּמְצוֹת אָפֶה וַיֵּאכְלוּ:

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening and Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom and Lot saw and he arose to meet them and he prostrated on his face to the ground. He said, 'Behold, please, sirs, turn to the house of your servant and sleep and wash your feet and arise early in the morning and then you will go on your path'; they said, 'no, we will sleep in the street'. He urged them strongly and they turned to him and came to his house and he made them a feast and he baked matzos and they ate.

Finally, we read about hospitality without any particular context whatsoever. Following the covenant with the Plishtim, the Torah writes (ibid. Perek 21/Posuk 33):

וַיִּטַע אֲשֵׁל בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא שְׁם בְּשֵׁם ה' קַל עוֹלָם:

Avraham planted an *eishel* in Beersheva and he called there in the Name of Hashem the G-d of the universe.

Rashi explains the meaning of *eishel* and the final phrase of the verse:

אשל - רב ושמואל, חד אמר פרדס להביא ממנו פירות לאורחים בסעודה, וחד אמר פונדק לאכסניא ובו כל מיני פירות. ומצינו לשון נטיעה באהלים, שנאמר (דניאל יא/מה<sup>2</sup>) ויטע אהלי אפדנו:

*Eishel* – Rav and Shmuel disputed the meaning of this term. One said that *eishel*<sup>3</sup> is an orchard that Avraham planted to take fruit from it for the meal he prepared for his guests.

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<sup>2</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיִּטַע אֲהֵלִי אֶפְדָּנוּ בֵּין יַמִּים לְהָר צְבִי קִדְּשׁ וַיָּבֹא עַד קִצּוֹ וַאֲיִן עוֹזֵר לוֹ:  
[A future king] will erect the tents of his palace between the seas and My Holy desired mountain; he will come to his end and no one will aid him.

<sup>3</sup> *Eishel* does mean a tree in other contexts. See Shmuel I Perek 22/Posuk 6 and Perek 31/Posuk 13).

In the context of our verse, one of these unspecified *Amoraim* held that it was unlikely that the tree itself was the direct cause of 'proclaiming the Name of G-d' and thus

The other said that it was a way-station used as a guest house and he served much fruit there.

We have found that the term 'planting' is used regarding [erecting] tents as it says, 'he will erect the tents of His palace'.

ויקרא שם וגו' - על ידי אותו אשל נקרא שמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא א...לוק לכל העולם.  
לאחר שאוכלים ושותים אומר להם ברכו למי שאכלתם משלו, סבורים אתם שמשלי  
אכלתם, משל מי שאמר והיה העולם אכלתם:

*He called in the Name etc.* – By virtue of that *eishel*, the Name of HaKodosh Boruch Hu was proclaimed by everyone. After they would eat and drink, Avraham said to his guests, 'Bless Him from Whom you have eaten. Do you think that I meant "bless me – that you have eaten my food"? I meant bless Him from Whom you ate - "From Him Who spoke and the world was created."

It is the first episode of *Hachnosas Orchim* to which we will attend here.

Chazal teach us a famous Halachah based on the two possibilities of reading the word *A...do...noi* in Posuk 3 there.

Above we translated it as 'my masters' and the reference is the way in which Avraham Ovinu addressed the three angels. That mode of address is consistent with the way in which Avraham Ovinu refers to himself in that very same verse – עבדך – your servant.

On the other hand we find an inconsistency. As we brought above, Lot also welcomed the angels into his home and he also addressed them as 'my masters'. But there is a difference in how 'my masters' is written regarding Lot and how 'my masters' is written in our Parsha.

In reference to Lot, the last syllable of the word is written *nai*, with the *patach* vowel under the letter *nun*. In the verse in which Avraham addressed the angels, the last syllable of the word is written *noi*, with the *komatz* vowel under the letter *nun*.

Since the word *A...do...noi*, ending with the syllable *noi* also means My Master, referring to HaKodosh Boruch Hu and we never find the syllable of *nai* referring to

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understood the term אשל as being and acronym for לִינָה, שְׁתִּיהַ, אֲכִילָה: a *place* of eating, drinking and sleeping.

Hashem, there is an alternative translation to the word *A...do...noi* in regard to Avraham's *hachonosas orchim*. That alternative explanation is that Avraham Ovinu was addressing the Shechinah<sup>4</sup>.

According to the opinion that *A...do...noi* refers to the Shechinah, we must review what Avraham Ovinu spoke to G-d in the context of the events that occurred then.

Rashi explains:

ויאמר א...ד...נ...י אם נא וגו'...דבר אחר קודש הוא, והיה אומר להקדוש ברוך הוא להמתין לו עד שירוך וכניס את האורחים...ושתי הלשונות בבראשית רבה (מח/י):

*He said a...do...noi... if please* – Another explanation is that this word is Holy. Avraham was speaking to Hashem and asked Him, Hashem, to wait for him, Avraham, to run and offer hospitality to the travellers. Both explanations of this word are in Midrash B'reishis Rabba.

I would imagine that if we were unaware of the events that would soon unfold and would be told of such a scenario in a 'what if' type of question, we would all respond that Avraham Ovinu erred grievously in leaving G-d to greet mere beings of flesh and blood.

And, hopefully our answer would not be based on emotion only. We would have Halachic proofs explaining why we think that Avraham erred.

Certainly, we would begin with the point that the honor of G-d is superior to the honor of mankind. That is, when we want to show ultimate respect for Talmidei Chachamim or for our parents, we cite the verses that compare those unique personages with HaKodosh Boruch Hu, thus demonstrating that His honor is of paramount importance.

We know of course that we must honor our parents. The Posuk teaches us that (Sh'mos Perek 20/Posuk 12):

כִּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּ יְמֵיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

Honor your father and your mother in order that your days will be lengthened on the land that Hashem your G-d gives to you.

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<sup>4</sup> See Masseches Sh'vuos (35 b) for a discussion regarding the meaning of the word *A...do...noi* in our Parsha.

Perhaps I am also familiar with the way that Rambam expresses this Mitzvah. We read in his Mishneh Torah Hilchos Mamrim (Perek 6/Halachah 1):

כבוד אב ואם מצות עשה גדולה

Honoring one's father and mother is a great positive Mitzvah.

We would likely say that every Mitzvah is important – yet Rambam adds a special emphasis by writing מצוה גדולה – a great Mitzvah.

But the unique importance of *Kibbud Av VaEim* is because it is compared to the honor that we must extend to Hashem.

We read in Masseches Kiddushin (30 b):

תנו רבנן נאמר: כבוד את אביך ואת אמך, ונאמר: (משלי ג/ט<sup>5</sup>) כבוד את ה' מהונך,  
השוה הכתוב כבוד אב ואם לכבוד המקום ;

[The Torah compares honoring father and mother with honoring the Omnipresent. The Rabbis learned in a Braisa] It says, 'a person should honor his father and his mother' and it says, 'Honor G-d from your wealth.'

Parental honor is understood to be of extraordinary importance because the Torah attaches it to the honor that we must show Hashem.

It is obvious that honoring G-d is the highest standard.

In that same vein we read in Parshas Kedoshim (Vayikro Perek 19/Posuk 3):

אִישׁ אָמוּ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֵת שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי ה' אֵלֶיךָם:

A person shall be in awe of his mother and father and My Sabbaths you shall guard; I am Hashem your G-d.

Rashi writes:

ואת שבתתי תשמרו - סמך שמירת שבת למורא אב, לומר אף על פי שהזהרתך על מורא אב, אם יאמר לך חלל את השבת אל תשמע לו, וכן בשאר כל המצות:

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<sup>5</sup> The entire verse reads:

כָּבֹד אֶת ה' מֵהוֹנֶךָ וּמֵרֵאשִׁית כָּל תְּבוּאֹתֶיךָ:  
Honor G-d from your wealth and from the first of your grain.

*My Sabbaths you shall observe* – The Torah juxtaposes Shabbos observance with parental awe to say that even though I Hashem warned you regarding parental awe, if he says ‘violate Shabbos’, do not listen to him. This applies to all Mitzvos.

אני ה' א...ל"קיכם - אתה ואביך חייבים בכבודי, לפיכך לא תשמע לו לבטל את דברי.

*I am Hashem your G-d* – you and your father are obligated with My honor. Therefore, do not listen to him to nullify My Word.

The hierarchy is clear and not surprising. G-d is at the top of His own pyramid. Mankind does not come even close.

And the same is true regarding the honor that we bestow upon Gedolei Yisroel and other Talmidei Chachamim<sup>6</sup>.

We learn in Masseches Kiddushin (57 a):

דתניא: שמעון העמסוני, ואמרי לה נחמיה העמסוני, היה דורש כל אתין שבתורה, כיון שהגיע לאת ה' א...ל"קיך תירא פירש; אמרו לו תלמידיו: רבי, כל אתין שדרשת מה תהא עליהם? אמר להם: כשם שקבלתי שכר על הדרישה, כך קבלתי על הפרישה; עד שבא רבי עקיבא ולימד: את ה' א...ל"קיך תירא - לרבות תלמידי חכמים.

The Braisa taught: Shimon from Amson, and some say it was Nechemia from Amson, would interpret the word *את*, *es*, each time it appeared in the Torah. When he came to interpret the word *es* in the verse ‘you should fear *es* Hashem your G-d’ he desisted [from all of them]. His students said to him, ‘Rebbe – all of your interpretations of *es* throughout the Torah – what will

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<sup>6</sup> The commentators discuss the implications of Rambam’s precise expression in list of Mitzvos that preface Hilchos Talmud Torah. We read there:

הלכות תלמוד תורה. יש בכללן, שתי מצות עשה. וזהו פרטן: (א) ללמוד תורה. (ב) לכבד מלמדיה ויודעיה.

The Laws of Talmud Torah and contained in there are two positive commandments: 1. To learn Torah. 2. To honor teachers of Torah and those who know Torah.

The implication and Rambam’s intent with the words ‘teachers of Torah and those who know Torah’ give way to much discussion.

be with them?’ He said, ‘Just like I received reward for the interpretations so I will receive reward for the retractions.’

This [retraction] held true until Rabi Akiva came and taught, ‘you should fear *es* Hashem your G-d’ –the word *es* in this verse comes to include *Talmidei Chachamim*.

Rashi elucidates:

היה דורש כל אתין שבתורה - לריבויא.

*He would interpret each word ‘es’ in the Torah – to come to include<sup>7</sup> a new aspect.*

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<sup>7</sup> It is appropriate to discuss the word ‘es’. When I was an afternoon Hebrew School student some 60+ years ago and we came across the word *es*, I remember that the teacher said, ‘it is not translated; it is understood’. I didn’t have the slightest idea was behind ‘understood’ and couldn’t comprehend why if there is a word that is written it has no meaning.

As time went on, I was told that the word *es* teaches us that there is a ‘direct object’, in the language of grammarians, following it. But it was easy to be skeptical of such and explanation when there are many P’sukim in the Torah that have a direct object and they get by just fine without the word *es*.

Rabi Shimon HaAmsoni taught that, in fact, every *es* has a meaning.

If the reader has come across the word *את* pronounced as *eis* because there is a *tzeirei* vowel underneath it, the reader knows that that *eis* is translated as ‘with’. Just like the word *אתי* is translated as ‘with me’ and *אתך* is translated as ‘with you’, etc.

Thus, Rabi Shimon HaAmsoni taught the word *es* means ‘with’. For example, he interpreted the first Posuk of the Torah:

בראשית ברא א...ל'קים את השמים ואת הארץ

In the beginning of G-d’s creating the heavens and the earth to include all that was made ‘with the heavens’ and all that was made ‘with the earth’.

Rabi Shimon HaAmsoni held that if he was correct, his approach had to apply to every instance in the Torah and when he came to the one instance where he held that his interpretative approach could not hold, he had to retract all of his previous interpretations.

Rabi Akiva justified the interpretation of the word *es* in the verse *את ה' א...ל'קיר תירא* and thus restored all of Rabi Shimon HaAmsoni’s previous interpretations.

פירש - שירא לרבות שום דבר להשוותו למורא המקום.

*He desisted* – he was afraid to include something that would make its status equivalent to the awe of G-d.

Why did Rabi Akiva differ? Maharsha writes:

דריש כל אתין שבתורה וכו'. שזהו ודאי כבוד התורה שאין בה שום אמת שלא לצורך ולזה קאמר כשם שקבלתי שכר על הדרישה מפני כבוד התורה כן אקבל שכר על הפרישה שזו כבוד שמים הוא שאין להשוות לו שום דבר לרבות ורבי עקיבא לא היה חש בזה מלרבות תלמידי חכמים שגם זה בכלל כבוד שמים ותורתו שהם לומדים אותה וקל להבין:

*He interpreted every 'es' in the Torah etc.* – It is certainly the honor and respect that we give to the Torah [by interpreting every word, including *es*] because there is not one letter in the Torah that is unnecessary. In that reference, Rabi Shimon HaAmsoni said, 'just like I received reward on the interpretation because it gave honor to the Torah, so I will receive reward on the retraction because it is for the honor of Heaven that there is nothing to compare to the honor of G-d and include something new.

Rabi Akiva was not concerned for Rabi Shimon HaAmsoni's concern by adding the honor of Talmidei Chachamim because the honor given to Talmidei Chachamim is part of giving honor to Heaven and giving honor to His Torah that they learn. This is easy to understand.

Rambam writes in his Sefer HaMitzvos (Mitzvas Aseh 209):

והמצוה הר"ט היא שצונו לכבד החכמים ולקום מפניהם ולגדל אותם והוא אמרו יתברך (ויקרא יט/לב<sup>8</sup>) מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן: ובבאור אמרו (אבות ד/יב) מורא רבך כמורא שמים.

The 209<sup>th</sup> Mitzvah is that G-d commanded us to honor the wise and to arise before them and to aggrandize them. That is what Hashem says, 'From

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<sup>8</sup> The entire verse reads:

מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן ויראת מא...לקיה אָני ה':  
From before the white-haired one arise and give honor to the elder; you shall be in awe from Hashem your G-d.



before the white-haired one rise; give honor to the elder and you shall be in awe of Hashem your G-d.'

And Chazal said clearly: The awe of your Rav is like the awe of Heaven.

Here, too, we see that even the great honor that we give to our wise men is a derivative of our honoring G-d. They, too, are secondary to Him.

And the Halachah seems clear as well.

When are we fortunate לקבל פני השכינה, to greet G-d, as it were? That is when we are reciting the Amida.

The Mishna in Masseches B'rachos teaches us of the absolute prohibition to interrupt our recitation of the Amida. We read there (30 b):

אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כבוד ראש. חסידים הראשונים היו שוהין שעה אחת ומתפללין, כדי שיכוונו לבם לאביהם שבשמים. אפילו המלך שואל בשלומו לא ישיבנו, ואפילו נחש כרוך על עקבו לא יפסיק.

One only arises to recite the *Amida* out of seriousness. The early pious people would wait a certain amount of time and only then recite the *Amida* in order that they would direct their heart to their Father in Heaven. Even if the king inquires about one's well-being, do not respond to him. Even if there is a snake circled around one's ankle, do not interrupt<sup>9</sup>.

If it needed to be proven, and I doubt it, we see indisputably that G-d's honor supercedes man's honor – even that of a most honored personage<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Rashi explains that the refusal to respond to the king and the obligation not to move away from the snake are in cases where neither the king nor the snake will bring actual bodily harm.

Certainly, though, both will bring great discomfort and anxiety. That discomfort and that anxiety do not justify interrupting the recitation of the *Amida*; lesser *kavana* is not allowed.

<sup>10</sup> The King of Israel is the most honored person. He is so honored that he is the only individual who is allowed to sit in the *Azara* of the Beis HaMikdosh. Such is not allowed for even the Kohen Godol. That is what we read in Masseches Yoma (25 a):

Despite all this, we learn in Masseches Shabbos (127 a):

אמר רבי יוחנן: גדולה הכנסת אורחין כהשכמת בית המדרש...ורב דימי מנהרדעא  
אמר: יותר מהשכמת בית המדרש...אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: גדולה הכנסת אורחין  
מהקבלת פני שכינה, דכתיב ויאמר א...ד...ג...אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבר  
וגו'.

Rabi Yochanan said, 'Hospitality for guests is as great as arising early for [study] in the Beis Midrash.' Rav Dimi of Nehardea said, 'it is *greater* than arising early for study in the Beis Midrash.'

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: 'Hospitality for guests is greater than greeting the Shechina as it says, '[Avram said], "My Master, if I have found pleasure in your eyes, please do not pass..."

Certainly in light of the explanation of the Maharsha that we saw earlier, the statements concerning Torah study and 'greeting the Shechina' are very much related.

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Sitting in the *Azarah* is allowed only for the Kings who are descended from Dovid HaMelech.

But even in regards to this sublime office holder we read in Parshas Shoftim (D'vorim Perek 17/P'sukim 18-19):

וְהָיָה כִּשְׁבָתוֹ עַל כֹּסֵא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ וְכָתַב לוֹ אֶת מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל סֵפֶר מְלִפְנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:  
וְהָיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו לְמַעַן יִלְמַד לְיִרְאָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵי לְקִיּוֹ לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה  
הַזֹּאת וְאֶת הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה לַעֲשׂוֹתָם:

It will be when he is sitting on the throne of his reign, he shall write a copy of this Torah on a scroll from before the Kohanim-Levi'im. It shall be with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life in order that he shall learn to fear Hashem his G-d and to guard all of the words of this Torah and these statutes to do them.

Even the King is subservient to Hashem. All the more so is everyone else subservient to the Master of the Universe.

But, our question is, why is it that Avraham Ovinu could leave the Shechina to give honor to people, perhaps very lowly ones at that<sup>11</sup>, who are as subjugated to G-d no less than Avraham?

I have seen a number of answers to this question. For example, I was referred to the little-known Sefer 'O'ver Orach' which was written by the Aderes<sup>12</sup> in which he explains that it is the very uniqueness of קבלת פני השכינה that allows it to be overruled for הכנסת אורחים – hospitality.

Because one should always seek to greet the Shechinah, it is an ongoing Mitzvah that never ceases. If it would be prohibited to violate that Mitzvah for hospitality, then the Mitzvah of הכנסת אורחים could never be fulfilled. And thus, it is the uniqueness of greeting the Shechinah which permits its 'violation'<sup>13</sup>.

*Pardes Yosef*, at the beginning of our Parshas Vayera brings the explanation of Rabi Yitzchak miVorka who answers our question after posing a more basic question. He asked, how did Avraham Ovinu know that he could leave the Presence of the Shechinah to greet potential guests and offer them hospitality<sup>14</sup>?

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<sup>11</sup> When Avraham Ovinu offers his hospitality, he tells the prospective guests that they will wash their feet. Rashi explains:

ורחצו רגליכם - כסבור שהם ערביים שמשתחוים לאבק רגליהם והקפיד שלא להכניס עבודה זרה לביתו.

*You will wash your feet* – Avraham thought that these were Arabs who worshipped the dust of their feet and he was most particular not to allow idolatry to enter into his house.

<sup>12</sup> The Aderes, Rav Eliyahu Dovid Rabinowitz, was the Rav in Ponevezh in the late 1800's and was invited to Yerushalayim to be the head of the *Eida Charedis*. He made Aliya circa 1900 and fulfilled that exalted position. He died soon after arriving in Yerushalyim.

His son-in-law, Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, wrote a monograph about his father-in-law and named it אדר היקר.

<sup>13</sup> Of course, this logic would permit the fulfillment of any temporal Mitzvah, not only hospitality of guests, to override קבלת פני השכינה. Further explanation is necessary.

<sup>14</sup> Before seeing the answer offered by Rabi Yitzchak miVorka we may preempt his response by noting that Avraham Ovinu discerned the Will of G-d and chose to observe His commandments.

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This idea is brought in Rashi's commentary to the Posuk in Parshas Toldos (B'reishis Perek 26/P'sukim 1-5) where we read Hashem's words to Yitzchak Ovinu prior to his planned descent into Egypt:

וְהָיָה רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהָרַעַב הָרָאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְיָמֵי אַבְרָהָם וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ פְּלִשְׁתִּים גְּרָרָה: וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו תֵּרַד מִצְרַיִם שָׁכֵן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ: גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְאֶבְרַכְךָ כִּי לֹךְ וְלִזְרָעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת כָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל וְהַקְּמַתִּי אֶת הַשְּׂבָעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ: וְהָרַבִּיתִי אֶת זְרָעֲךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנָתַתִּי לְזָרְעֲךָ אֶת כָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל וְהַתְּבַרְכוּ בְּזָרְעֲךָ כָּל גּוֹי הָאֲרָץ: עַקֵּב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע אַבְרָהָם בְּקֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמַרְתִּי מִצְוֹתַי חֻקּוֹתַי וְתוֹרָתִי:

There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that occurred in the days of Avraham; Yitzchak went to Avimelech the King of the Philistines, to G'ror. Hashem appeared to Yitzchak and He said, 'Do not descend to Egypt; dwell in the land that I Hashem will say to you. Sojourn in this land and I Hashem will be with you and I will bless you because to you and to your seed I will give all of these lands and I will establish the oath that I swore to Avraham, your father. I will increase your seed like the stars of the sky and I will give your seed all of this all of these lands and all the nations of the land will be blessed by your seed. Because Avraham listened to My voice and he guarded My guard, My commandments, My statutes and My Torah.'

Rashi writes:

וישמר משמרת - גזרות להרחקה על אזהרות שבתורה, כגון שניות לעריות ושבות לשבת:  
He guarded My guard – Rabbinic prohibitions to distance a person from the prohibitions in the Torah such as rabbinically prohibited relations and rabbinically prohibited actions on Shabbos.

מצותי - דברים שאילו לא נכתבו ראויין הם להצטוות כגון גזל ושפיכות דמים:  
*My Mitzvos* – Commandments that even if they weren't written, it was understood that they were appropriate to be commanded such as thievery and murder.

חקותי - דברים שיצר הרע ואומות העולם משיבין עליהם כגון אכילת חזיר ולבישת שעטנז שאין טעם בדבר אלא גזירת המלך וחקותיו על עבדיו:  
*My statutes* – Those matters that the *yetzer ha'ra* and the nations of the world respond to them [with disrespect] such as the prohibition of eating pig, the prohibition of wearing *Shaatznez* for which there is no reason – rather they are the decree of the King and His statutes for his servants.

ותורת - להביא תורה שבעל פה, הלכה למשה מסיני:  
*My Torah* – This includes *Torah She'ba'al Peh* and those Halachos that were given to Moshe on Mt. Sinai.

The answer can be discerned by a careful reading of the initial verses of the Parsha and attending to their application.

We read (Perek 18/P'sukim 1-2):

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵי וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם: וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה  
שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיֵּרָץ לְקִרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה:

Hashem appeared to Avraham in Eilonei Mamrei and he was sitting at the opening of the tent in the heat of the day. He raised his eyes and he saw that behold three men were standing near him and he saw and he ran to greet them from the opening of his tent and he prostrated on the ground.

Rashi notes that the word יֹשֵׁב, which is pronounced *yosheiv* with the *cholom* vowel after the letter *yud* and the *tzeirei* vowel under the letter *shin*, which we translated as 'was sitting' can be read as *yoshav*, with the *komatz* vowel under the letter *yud* and the *patach* vowel under the letter *shin* – he sat rather than *yosheiv* – meaning 'he is sitting' as the word is vocalized in actuality.

Thus, Rashi explains that tension between 'sat' implying that he sat in the past but wasn't sitting now and 'is sitting' meaning that he is sitting at the present.

He explains:

ישב - ישב כתיב, בקש לעמוד, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא שב...

*Yosheiv* – *Yoshav* is written. Avraham sought to stand but Hashem told him, 'sit'.

Rabi Yitzchak miVorka notes that Rashi wrote:

בקש לעמוד

He *sought* to stand.

Rashi should have written that Avraham arose and Hashem told him to sit. What does it mean that Avraham *sought* to stand? Rabi Yitzchak miVorka answers that Avraham Ovinu certainly wanted to stand in the Presence of the Shechinah. However, in his weakened state, standing required special effort and thus he *sought* to stand.

The weakened state, of course, was due to the surgery of *Bris Milah* which he underwent at the age of ninety-nine and that was the purpose of G-d's visit, as Rashi writes:

וירא אליו - לבקר את החולה. אמר רבי חמא בר חנינא יום שלישי למילתו היה, ובא הקדוש ברוך הוא ושאל בשלומו:

*Hashem appeared to Avraham* – to visit the sick. Rabi Chama bar Chanina said that it was the third day following his circumcision and Hashem came to inquire about Avraham's welfare.

The weakness that is implied regarding Avraham Ovinu is most easily understood and therefore the following verse is astounding. What do we read regarding Avraham when he saw his potential guests:

וירץ לקראתם

He *ran* towards them!

A moment ago any movement presented difficulties for Avraham Ovinu and now he is running? The answer is that the very strength that he had to run could have been given to him only by G-d. Thus, in the very presence of greeting the Shechinah, Hashem empowered Avraham to be able to run to fulfill the Mitzvah of אורחים-hospitality for guests.

That Divinely-directed inspiration and empowerment informed Avraham and his descendants that giving priority to hospitality of guests was appropriate even at the expense of leaving the Shechinah.

An additional explanation is that of the *Meshech Chochmoh* who interprets an additional verse to support the statement of Chazal regarding the supreme importance of hospitality for guests.

Following the unsuccessful attempt of Avraham Ovinu to save Sedom and its environs, the Torah writes (Perek 18/Posuk 33):

וַיֵּלֶךְ ה' כְּאִשֶּׁר כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר אֶל אַבְרָהָם וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לְמִקְמוֹ:

Hashem went when He finished speaking to Avraham and Avraham returned to his place.

It would seem that we have nothing to learn from the phrase that says that 'Avraham returned to his place'. It seems to be devoid of meaning. However, Meshech Chochmoh says that this phrase has much to teach us. He writes:

וילך ה' כאשר כלה לדבר, ואברהם שב למקומו. הוא רמז למה שאמרו זכרונם לברכה: 'גדולה הכנסת אורחים מקבלת פני השכינה'. והנה אברהם היה עסוק בהכנסת אורחים. אם כן, כשהלך לדבר עם השכינה ושב למקומו - היינו שהלך למדרגה הגדולה שהיה לו מקודם. אבל לולא זה, היה אברהם הולך ממעלה אל מעלה, והוא הולך תמיד, ולא יתכן עליו "שב למקומו".

<sup>15</sup>*Hashem went when He finished speaking to Avraham and Avraham returned to his place.* This is a hint at what Chazal said, 'Hospitality for guests is greater than greeting the Shechinah.'

Behold, Avraham was busy with hospitality for his guests. Thus, when he went to speak to the Shechinah and then [we are told] that 'he returned to his [previous] place', it is indicating that he had been at a higher level [that of hospitality].

Were it not that hospitality was greater than greeting the Shechinah, it is certain that Avraham would have continued going from one level to the next highest level, as he always went, and thus writing 'he returned to his place' would not be appropriate to be written.

That is, if we would read the phrase 'returning to his place' out of the context of Avraham Ovinu, we would say that he went back to where he was. If we are talking about someone being inspired by G-d, we would say that after that moment of inspiration, he went back to the way that he was before speaking to the Shechinah.

But, since in all other instances Avraham Ovinu never returned to his previously lower level, because he was always attaining new heights in his spirituality, it would seem foreign and improper to say that he returned to where he was – implying a lesser, previous level.

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<sup>15</sup> We have incorporated the notes of Rav Yehuda Copperman ZT"l into our translation.

Therefore, only in this context is such a statement written, *Avraham returned to his place* thereby indicating the higher level of *Hachnosas Orchim*.<sup>16</sup> In our context, that temporary descent would be greeting the Shechinah following the higher level of *Hachnosas Orchim*!

I think that we can attempt to add another source for understanding how we know that hospitality for guests is greater than greeting the Shechinah and how Avraham Ovinu knew to behave in such a way.

When we conceive of G-d speaking to man, we are at a loss to truly comprehend what that means. Even when our ancestors knew that G-d was speaking to them, their sense of being overwhelmed made them flee from that extraordinary event.

In Parshas Yisro, when we learn about the actual time of Mattan Torah, we read (Sh'mos Perek 20/Posuk 15):

וְכָל הָעָם רְאִים אֶת הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת הַלַּפִּידִם וְאֶת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת הָהָר עֹשֵׁן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם  
וַיִּנְעוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרָחֵק:

The entire people saw the sounds and the torches and the sound of the Shofar and the smoking mountain and the people saw and they moved and stood from afar.

We have a greater understanding of what occurred when we read the account of Mattan Torah that Moshe Rabbenu gives in Parshas Voeschanan (D'vorim Perek 5/P'sukim 20-26):

וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַעְכֶּם אֶת הַקּוֹל מִתּוֹךְ הַחֹשֶׁךְ וְהָהָר בֵּעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וַתִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי כָּל רֹאשֵׁי שְׁבֻטֵיכֶם  
וַזְּקַנְיֹכֶם: וַתֹּאמְרוּ הֵן הָרֹאֵנוּ ה' אֵ... לְקִינוּ אֶת כְּבוֹדוֹ וְאֶת גְּדֻלוֹ וְאֶת קוֹלוֹ שְׁמַעְנוּ מִתּוֹךְ  
הָאֵשׁ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה רְאִינוּ כִּי יִדְבֵר אֵ... לְקִים אֶת הָאָדָם וְחִי: וְעַתָּה לָמָּה נִמּוֹת כִּי תֹאכְלֵנוּ  
הָאֵשׁ הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת אִם יִסְפִּים אֲנַחְנוּ לְשִׁמֵּעַ אֶת קוֹל ה' אֵ... לְקִינוּ עוֹד וּמִתְנוּ: כִּי מִי  
כָּל בֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע קוֹל אֵ... לְקִים חַיִּים מִדְּבַר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ כָּמֹנוּ וַיְחִי: קָרַב אֶתָּה וְשָׁמַע  
אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר ה' אֵ... לְקִינוּ וְאֶת תְּדַבֵּר אֵלֵינוּ אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֵר ה' אֵ... לְקִינוּ

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<sup>16</sup> The reader should be aware that prior to writing the following sentence, this writer had to take a break and consider *his* understanding of such a powerful statement that would seem to border on *k'firah*. It is true that the following sentence is only restating what Chazal said and Meshech Chochmoh is only referring to what Chazal said, but, nonetheless, it still has to be understood when expressed in such a raw form.



אֵלֶיךָ וְשָׁמְעֵנוּ וְעֲשֵׂינוּ: וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת קוֹל דְּבָרֶיכֶם בְּדַבְּרְכֶם אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת קוֹל דְּבָרֵי הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דָּבְרוּ אֵלַיךָ הִיטִיבוּ כֹל אֲשֶׁר דָּבְרוּ: מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם זֶה לָהֶם לִירְאָה אֹתִי וְלִשְׁמֹר אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי כֹּל הַיָּמִים לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לָהֶם וְלִבְנֵיהֶם לְעֹלָם:

And it was when you heard The Voice from amidst the darkness and the mountain burning in fire and you [B'nei Yisroel] approached me [Moshe] – all of the heads of your tribes and your elders. You said, 'Behold, Hashem our G-d has shown us His Glory and His Greatness and we heard His voice from the midst of the fire; this day we have seen that G-d will talk to man and man can live. Now, why should we die when this great fire will consume us; if we will continue to hear the voice of Hashem our G-d any longer we will die. Who is of flesh that heard the voice of the Living G-d speaking from the midst of the fire like we did, and has lived? You, Moshe, draw near and hear all that Hashem our G-d will say and you will speak to us all that Hashem our G-d will say to you – and we will listen and we will do.'

G-d listened to the sound of your words when you spoke to me and Hashem said to me, 'I heard the voice of the words of this people that they spoke to you; all that they spoke was good. May it be that their heart should be like this for them to fear Me and to guard all of My commandments all the days in order that it will be good for them and for their children forever'

Since HaKodosh Boruch Hu gave His imprimatur to the words our ancestors spoke, we know that they spoke correctly.

That is, they understood that G-d revealed Himself for a purpose. Besides giving the Torah, He also demonstrated that G-d does talk to man and therefore, clearly and unequivocally, Moshe was appointed as His *shliach*<sup>17</sup>. However, once that proof was given, it was beyond the ability of Israel to continue to hear the voice of G-d.

Thus, one parameter has been set: G-d speaks to man to validate that the object of His conversation is His *shliach*. That was a one-time event because only Moshe Rabbenu would be *the* Shliach of HaKodosh Boruch Hu, transmitting the Torah perfectly.

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<sup>17</sup> See Rambam Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Perek 7/Halachah 7 and Perek 8/Halachah 1.

An additional parameter has been set as well. G-d speaks to man to convey His Will. When the Will is a Mitzvah of the Torah, it is transmitted to Moshe Rabbenu exclusively; not to anyone else.

When the Will is directing Israel to its proper path, G-d also conveys His Will to His other prophets.

Otherwise, all other communications from HaKodosh Boruch Hu to man is done indirectly.

Thus, the question is raised, what are we to make of the Divine visit that Hashem made to Avraham Ovinu as the latter was recovering from his surgery?

Was it a social call, like we would make to visit our friends and ask them how they are doing? If that is so, is a new parameter of Divine Revelation<sup>18</sup> being introduced in our Parsha?

The answer, thus, may be that the Revelation with which Parshas Vayera begins is one that comes to teach the primacy of acts of *chessed*, in this case הכנסת אורחים, hospitality for guests. HaKodosh Boruch Hu revealed Himself, allowed His Divine privacy to be exposed to teach the unique standing of הכנסת אורחים, thus remaining within the parameters that He set.

It was this Revelation itself that teaches us

גדולה הכנסת אורחים מקבלת פני השכינה

Hospitality for guests is greater than greeting the Shechinah.

The question before us, now, is not only the source of this Halachah. Whether or not we have been successful in suggesting the idea behind it, the Halachah is clear. And thus the question posed to us is how we bring ourselves to fulfil this sublime commandment.

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<sup>18</sup> It is certain that there are varying degrees of Divine Revelation with the highest degree being Hashem's ongoing revelation to Moshe Rabbenu and the brief exposure all of Israel had to that level when G-d revealed Himself to all of Israel and gave the *Aseres HaDibros*.

But, a revelation is a revelation and the one that occurred with Avraham Ovinu certainly meets that criterion.

The translation of *hachnosas orchim* is 'bringing in the wayfarers'. Our guests are called אורחים because they are on the אורח, the path or the road or the highway.

And, if your abode is in the wilderness and you see people on their trek it is reasonable to assume that they have no roof to put over their heads at night and, if they have, their food is scarce and probably not so fresh or tasty.

What a relief if one offers them a bed to sleep in, within a home and food to eat at a set table and thereby fulfilling the Mitzvah of *Hachnosas Orchim* on a level of *mehadrin*.

The question the contemporary person must ask himself is 'where do we have such an opportunity?'

It is true, that by donating money for the poor, we do partially fulfil this Mitzvah. That is what we read in Hilchos Pesach as we prepare to recite the Haggadah Shel Pesach and say:

כל דכפין ייתי ויכול

All who are hungry, let them come and eat.

It is in that context that Shulchan Aruch writes (Orach Chaim Siman 429, s'if 1):

הגה: ומנהג לקנות חטים לחלקן לעניים

Rama: It a Jewish custom to buy wheat and distribute to the poor [to bake Matzos].

In s'if koton 3, Mishna Brurah writes:

ומנהג וכו' - הוא מנהג קדום מזמן הגמרא והובא דבר זה בירושלמי פרק קמא דבבא בתרא ויכולין בני העיר לכפות זה לזה לענין זה:

*A custom etc.* – This is an ancient custom from the time of the Gemara and is mentioned in Yerushalmi Masseches Bava Basra in the first Perek.

The citizenship of a city can require all to [donate] for this matter.

He continues in s'if koton 4:

חטים לחלקן - ובמדינותינו המנהג לחלק להן קמח שעל ידי זה מקרבא הנייתה טפי ושיעור הנתינה הוא כפי צרכו לכל ימי הפסח ופשוט דאם הוא עני גדול ואין לו במה לאפות המצה צריך ליתן לו גם דמי האפיה דהוא בכלל די מחסורו אשר יחסר לו:

*Wheat to distribute* – In our countries the custom is to distribute flour thus making the benefit more accessible<sup>19</sup>. The amount to give is the amount necessary for the entire Yom Tov of Pesach. It is obvious that if person is very poor and he has no means of baking Matzah that we give him funds to pay for the cost of the baking. That is part of the Mitzvah of giving him what he is missing<sup>20</sup>.

As wonderful as this Mitzvah of *Maos Chittim* is, it is not a complete fulfilment of *Hachnosas Orchim*.

The answer that we all have is that first rarely do we encounter by chance someone who meets the standards of the wayfarer of Avraham Ovinu. And, if we do, we may be frightened, legitimately, to let them into our homes.

So, what are we to do?

First, we must remember that when our friends come to our homes for a Shabbos meal or dessert, it usually isn't an act of *Hachnosas Orchim*. It may be a lovely act of friendship which is a Mitzvah in and of itself, but our friends, hopefully, would have had a lovely Shabbos meal at home if we didn't invite them.

Could there be *Hachnosas Orchim* for these guests? It certainly could be, especially if they are not 'regulars', to make sure that they are very (!) comfortable in our

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<sup>19</sup> Wheat requires numerous processes to turn it into flour. Those processes are a burden. By supplying ready-to-bake flour, the burden has been lightened considerably.

<sup>20</sup> These words are taken from a verse in Parshas R'eh. We read there (D'vorim Perek 15/P'sukim 7-8):

כִּי יְהִי בְךָ אֲבִיּוֹן מֵאֶחָד אֶחָיִךְ בְּאֶחָד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאַרְצֶךָ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תֹאמֵץ אֶת לִבְבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֶחָיִךְ הָאֲבִיּוֹן: כִּי פֶתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֶעֱבַט תַּעֲבִיטֵנוּ דִּי מִחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסָר לוֹ:

When you have among you a poor person from one of your brothers in one of your gates in your land that Hashem your G-d gives to you, do not make your heart strong and do not close your hand from your brother, your poor person. Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him and lend him enough for what he is lacking, that which is lacking to him.

house. If my company feels ill-at-ease and I do my best to remove such a sense of dissatisfaction or discomfort - that may meet the criteria of *Hachnosas Orchim*.

However, as worthy as the above is, it does not take away the obligation to seek to fulfill *Hachnosas Orchim* in its most complete sense. Often the shuls in which we daven ask for volunteers for a visiting family who come for a simcha or because someone is ill or because they are looking to make a move to a new city or a new neighborhood. Sometimes, there are *Baalei Teshuva* who want to see if they can 'belong' and fit in or perhaps it is a prospective *Ger Tzedek* who is being directed and mentored properly to be a full Shomer/es Torah U Mitzvos who will find comfort and security in our presence.

When someone feels lonely and then they are recognized by the other<sup>21</sup>, they receive a gift that goes far beyond bed and breakfast. Their humanity is recognized and their sense of belongingness to the Jewish People is strengthened or even restored.

In fact, we are all *Orchim* if we are fortunate. We are all on a path and we not only pray that the trajectory of that path will be upward, we direct our efforts and *hishtadlus* to that goal.

If we dedicate ourselves to this great Mitzvah we can turn to HaKodosh Boruch Hu who directed us to give this Mitzvah priority over His own *kavod* and say:

Ribbono Shel Olom! We have following your commandments and have sought and cared for *Orchim* who are on their various paths. I, too, am on my path, please welcome me and extend the hospitality that I so desire so that I can be part of Your House.

אַחַת שְׂאֵלְתִי מֵאֵת ה' אֹתָהּ אֶבְקֶשׁ שְׁבִתִי בְּבֵית ה' כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי לַחַזוֹת בְּנֹעַם ה'  
וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכָלוֹ<sup>22</sup>:

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<sup>21</sup> Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Boston ZT"l wrote an article entitled 'The Community' that appeared in the *Tradition* magazine in 1978. This thought is taken from that article which expands upon the meaning of such interpersonal recognition.

<sup>22</sup> Tehillim Perek 27/Posuk 4.

One thing I have asked from G-d; that is what I seek. Sit me in the House of Hashem all the days of my life; let me view the pleasantness of Hashem and visit his inner sanctuary.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock