

The Word Before the Name

One pasuk. Three commentators. One small word.

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלַיִי מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח-הָאֵהָל כָּחֹם הַיּוֹם

"Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day."
בראשית י"ח:א

אור החיים
OHR HACHAIM

מֶרְכָּבָה A Chariot for the Shechinah

אור החיים, בראשית י"ח:א

Why does the pasuk put "eilav" before the Name? The Ohr HaChaim says it tells us that Hashem revealed His Shechinah upon Avraham himself: Avraham had become a chariot for the Shechinah, as Chazal say that the Avos are the merkavah (Bereishis Rabbah 47:6).

That, he adds, is why the later prophecies to Avraham are introduced with "vayomer Hashem," not "vayeira": Hashem is already before him, a crown on his head.

כלי יקר
KLI YAKAR

עָנֹ To Him, Not to His Title

כלי יקר, בראשית י"ח:א

Why "vayeira eilav," and not "vayeira Hashem el Avraham"? In his first answer, the Kli Yakar says Avraham's name and his essence were opposites. "Avraham" ("av hamon goyim") is a name of rank and greatness, but in essence he was the humblest of men: "ve'anochi afar va'eifer."

So that no one would say that Hashem reveals Himself more to the great because of their greatness, the pasuk says "eilav," to him: for what he was, not for what he was called. As Chazal say (Nedarim 38a), the Shechinah rests only on one who is strong, wealthy, wise, and humble.

מלבי"ם
MALBIM

מוֹכֵן Ready Through His Own Merit

מלבי"ם, בראשית י"ח:א

The Malbim says that when a pasuk has a verb, a subject, and a word referring to the person, like "eilav," the order is deliberate, and placing that word ahead of the subject stresses it. The stress here is that Avraham was himself ready: Hashem appeared to him through his own merit and preparation. Before the milah he needed help from Above; now he was personally prepared for this revelation.

And the setting was far from ideal for nevuah. Avraham was sitting, not falling on his face as before the milah; he was at the entrance of the tent, no place for seclusion; and it was the heat of the day, when a person is weary and nevuah needs a rested, calm body.

FOR THE TABLE

In these readings, the focus is on Avraham himself—his closeness to the Shechinah, his humility, his readiness for nevuah. This week, put your effort into who you are rather than how you are known.

WORTH ASKING

The Malbim points out that this was a poor moment for nevuah — at the tent entrance, with the household around, in the heat of the day — and Hashem appeared anyway, "to him." What makes it hard for you to be ready, and what can you do?