

PENINEI MEHKERE ERES

פניני מחקרי ארץ

HaRav HaGaon Rachamim Moshe Shayo Shlit"a

פרשת וירא תשפ"ז

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ

"And he said: My Lord, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass on from Your servant." (18:3)

Our *Chachamim* in *Masechet Shevuot* (35b) offer two interpretations of whom Abraham was addressing when he said "אל נא תעבור מעל עבדך." The first is that Abraham *Abinu* said it to Hashem. Since Hashem had come to visit him, when Abraham wished to welcome the group of guests, it would not have been proper to greet them without first asking Hashem's permission to step out of His visit. He therefore said to Hashem: "If I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not depart from Your servant." From here we learn that *hachnasat orchim* is greater than greeting the *Shechinah*, for Abraham was prepared to receive his guests even at the cost of Hashem's departure. He only asked that Hashem not withdraw His Presence from him on their account. According to this reading, the name in the verse is holy, since it refers to Hashem.

The second interpretation is that Abraham was speaking to the angels. He addressed them all as "my lords," and said to them: if I have found favor in your eyes, do not pass by without entering my home. As for the singular "אל נא תעבור," Rashi explains that he spoke to the greatest among them, for if he would not bypass Abraham, his companions would remain as well. According to this reading, the title "my lord" is simply a respectful form of address, not a reference to Hashem.

The phrase "אם נא מצאתי חן" also requires understanding. To find favor means that even when a person does not deserve something by right, he is given a gift because he has found favor. We see this with Esther, who won the graciousness and kindness of all who saw her. When she had to approach the king, she stood in the inner courtyard of the palace, fearing that he might put her to death, since she had entered without permission and had not been summoned for thirty days. But when the king saw Queen Esther, she "won favor" in his eyes, and he extended the golden scepter to her. We see that one who wins favor is shown grace even if he is not deserving. The source of the word *chen* is therefore *chinam*, "free of charge." This is also why Hashem is called "רחום והנון," for it is His way to grant others a free gift. The expression "תחנונים ידבר רש" "A poor man speaks entreaties" likewise means the poor man asks for a gift given freely. For this

reason, at the end of our prayers we ask Hashem for *tachanunim*, a free gift even though we are unworthy.

So too here, when Abraham said to Hashem, "If I have found favor in Your eyes," he meant that even though he was not worthy of having the *Shechinah* rest upon him, since he was now occupied with guests and not with Hashem, he nevertheless asked "do not depart from Your servant," and begged that the *Shechinah* continue to rest with him.

All of this fits well if we explain that Abraham was speaking to Hashem. But if we say that Abraham *Abinu* was speaking to the angels, what sense is there in his asking them for a free gift? He is the one giving them a gift, not the other way around. On the contrary, it is the guest who must find favor in the eyes of the host. Moreover, this assumption is not merely our reasoning, but is confirmed in the following story:

In the book *Halichot Orchim* by Rabbi Yisrael David Stern, *shlita*, a story is told which the Gaon of Tshebin, *zt"l*, related to the

grandson of the *Admor Kedushat Tzion* of Bobov, *zt"l*. "For a time," recalled the Gaon, "the *Admor* of Bobov lived in Tshebin. During that period I married off my daughter and invited the *Admor* to the sheva berachot, and he did come, together with his son-in-law. As he sat there, the Bobover Rebbe took out money and gave it to his son-in-law to buy drinks for the assembled guests. I approached the *Admor* and told him that here I am the host, and it is not for him to provide the drinks. The Rebbe replied: 'But *Tosafot* states explicitly that the guest is the one who should bring drinks for the members

of the household.' I answered, with all due respect, that there is no such *Tosafot*. The Rebbe of Bobov was silent, and let it appear that he had made a mistake.

Some time later, I was teaching a class in the yeshiva on *Masechet Ketubot*, and I saw that it is stated explicitly in *Tosafot* (*Ketubot* 57b, d"h *hashta*): "לפי שדרך האורח להשקות לבני הבית כדי למצוא חן" "For it is the way of a guest to give drink to the members of the household, in order to find favor in their eyes." I was overwhelmed by the greatness of the *Admor*, who stayed silent rather than embarrass me by showing me the *Tosafot*. Many wondrous stories are told of the *Admor*, but in my opinion this story is a greater wonder than all of them.

We see from the words of *Tosafot*, as we posited above, that it is the guest who must find favor in the eyes of the host. This

“Some time later, I was teaching a class in the yeshiva on *Masechet Ketubot*, and I saw that it is stated explicitly in *Tosafot* (*Ketubot* 57b, d"h *hashta*): "לפי שדרך האורח להשקות לבני הבית כדי למצוא חן בעיניהם" "For it is the way of a guest to give drink to the members of the household, in order to find favor in their eyes." I was overwhelmed by the greatness of the *Admor*, who stayed silent rather than embarrass me by showing me the *Tosafot*. Many wondrous stories are told of the *Admor*, but in my opinion this story is a greater wonder than all of them.”

affirms our question: why did Abraham *Abinu* say to his guests, “If I have found favor in your eyes”?

The answer is that Abraham *Abinu* came to teach us a fundamental principle of *hachnasat orchim*. When a guest comes to a person’s home, the host must make him feel that it is the guest who is doing the host a favor. The guest should not feel that the host is doing him a favor by agreeing to take him in. He is doing the host a great kindness by giving him the merit of the *Mitzvah* of *hachnasat orchim*. We find this concept in the *Midrash* on Ruth (5:9): “תני רבי יהושע יותר ממה שבעל הבית עושה” “*Ribbi Yehoshua taught: more than the householder does for the poor man, the poor man does for the householder.*” For Ruth said to Naomi: “שם האיש” “*The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.*” It does not say “who worked with me,” but “with whom I worked.” Her wording carries the connotation of “for whom I did things.” I did much work and provided many kindnesses for him in return for the slice of bread he gave me. The work and kindnesses she had provided him were the opportunities he had to provide for and look after her

A story is told of a certain *Rosh Yeshivah* from *Eretz Yisrael* who took the opportunity to visit the Gaon Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, z”tl, while on a fundraising trip to America. In the course of the visit, Rabbi Moshe learned that the *Rosh Yeshivah* was also planning to travel to Canada. Rabbi Moshe asked whether he would do him a favor, since he was going to Canada, and deliver a letter from him to a certain man there. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was happy to fulfill Rabbi Moshe’s request and agreed to deliver the letter. In the end it became clear that the letter had nothing to do with Rabbi Moshe’s own needs. It was a letter to one of his students, asking him to help the Israeli *Rosh Yeshivah* with his fundraising. Rabbi Moshe did all this in order to give the guest a good feeling, as though he were the one doing a favor for Rabbi Moshe, zt”l.

This helps us understand the teaching of our *Chachamim* in *Masechet Arachin* (16b) that *nega'im* come as a result of stinginess, as it is written: “וְכָא אֲשֶׁר לוֹ הַבַּיִת” “*And the one to whom the house belongs shall come.*” The *Tanna deve Rabbi Yishmael* explains that this refers to one who keeps his house exclusively for himself, who does not host guests and imagines the house to be his alone. For this, the plague of *nig’ei batim* comes upon him. The depiction of this stingy man as one who considers his home to be his alone implies that the contrast – the ideal host – is one

who allows his guests to feel that his home is theirs. This is what we learned from Abraham *Abinu*, who said to his guests, “If I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass on from your servant.” Abraham *Abinu* considered himself a servant of the guest and pleaded with him not to pass him by.

This also explains the teaching of our *Chachamim* that *hachnasat orchim* is as great as greeting the *Shechinah*. When a husband and wife are found to be meritorious, the *Shechinah* dwells between them, the *Shechinah* rests in their home. But if a person does not

host guests, the *Shechinah* – itself a guest of sorts – feels as though it is unwelcome. When a person welcomes guests and gives them the feeling that the house is at their disposal, the *Shechinah* too settles there comfortably, because it sees that the house does not belong exclusively to the host. Thus, the equivalence of *hachnasat orchim* with greeting the *Shechinah* is not simply a comparison of values, but rather, is a lesson that the two are bound together, for only one who welcomes guests is found worthy of hosting the *Shechinah*.

In truth, Hashem is the Place of the world, and He is the true owner of every home, as it is written: “לֵהָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהָ” “*The earth and all it contains belong to Hashem.*” The *Gemara* states further in *Masechet Mo’ed Katan* (9b) that a

person in this world is only a guest. The holy *Shelah* (*Torah She’bichtav, Parashat Vayera*) writes: “כִּי כָל הָעוֹלָם אוֹרְחִים הֵם לַגִּבּוֹר” “*For the entire world are mere guests before Hashem, like a traveler who stops in to lodge, for we are sojourners; and He brings about their continued existence through the abundance He bestows upon them, and if for a blink of an eye He did not bestow it upon them and bring them into existence, everything would be lost.*”

If a person does not host guests and claims his home for himself alone, he is, as it were, pushing the *Shechinah* – the Presence of the true Owner of his home – out of his house. But when he welcomes guests and relinquishes his own claim on the home in favor of others, the *Shechinah* remains in its rightful place and permeates his home. And when the *Shechinah* rests in his home, Hashem, to whom the world and all it contains belong, bestows goodness and blessing on that house, for it is His own.



This weeks Divrei Torah is dedicated in honor of
Moshe & Mindy Glassman

Upon the birth of a baby boy

May they merit to see much nachat from him and all their children, with health,
happiness, and success, Amen!

שיזכו לגדלו לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים אמון!