בס״ד

Divrei HaRav

Parshas Vayeira 5787

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Rav of Khal Noam Hashem

Divrei Torah from Friday night, Shabbos day, and Shalosh Seudos
Prepared from a listener’s recollection

Friday Night

"גדולה הכנסת אורחין": The Mitzvah as a Deeper דביקות

The parsha opens as Hashem appears to Avraham Avinu: "וירא אליו ה' באלני ממרא והוא ישב פתח האהל כחם היום" (בראשית יח, א). Rashi explains that it was the third day after Avraham's ברית מילה, and הקב"ה came "לבקר את החולה", to visit the sick. In the very midst of this revelation Avraham lifts his eyes, sees three men standing over him, and runs from the opening of the tent to greet them. Then he says: "אדני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבר מעל עבדך", "My lord, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass away from your servant" (בראשית יח, ג).

Rashi offers two explanations of the word "אדני". According to the first, Avraham was addressing the greatest of the three מלאכים, who appeared to him as men: please do not pass on, but stay and eat; and once the leader stays, his companions will remain with him. According to the second, the word is קודש, a Name of Hashem. Avraham was speaking to הקב"ה Himself, "להמתין לו עד שירוץ ויכניס את האורחים", asking Him to wait while he ran to bring in the guests.

From this verse חז"ל derive a remarkable principle: "גדולה הכנסת אורחין מהקבלת פני שכינה", "Welcoming guests is greater than receiving the presence of the שכינה" (שבת קכז, א).

The Rav pointed out that at first glance this seems difficult, even counterintuitive; it might almost appear to border on חוצפה. Avraham is sitting in a state of דביקות with the שכינה, and he interrupts it to look after three wayfarers, who seem to be nothing more than dusty travelers passing along the road. How can a person ask Hashem to wait?

The Rav explained that there is no חוצפה here at all, and nothing counterintuitive. He illustrated the point with a simple משל. A friend walks over, and you greet him warmly: "שלום עליכם, how are you?" Then you give him a big hug. Does the hug interrupt the greeting? Of course not. It makes the greeting bigger.

So it is with הקב"ה. There is one kind of דביקות in standing in the presence of Hashem, and there is another kind in emulating Him: walking in His ways, in His מדת הרחמים and His גמילות חסדים. That is what Avraham was doing. He was not telling Hashem, as it were, "Hold on, I will be right back." He was saying: until now we have shared one kind of closeness, You and I; now I have the opportunity to expand that דביקות, by becoming a person who is like You and by doing Your מצוות.

This is how we must look at every מצוה. We do not step away from our דביקות with Hashem in order to perform a מצוה. The מצוה itself is an extension of that דביקות, and a deeper one, because through it we show Hashem that we want to be like Him. When we perform a מצוה, our focus should be that we are enlarging and strengthening our bond with הקב"ה through the very act we are doing.

The Rav added that this is in fact an explicit משנה: "יפה שעה אחת בתשובה ומעשים טובים בעולם הזה מכל חיי העולם הבא", "One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come" (אבות ד, יז). The דביקות of עולם הבא will be wondrous, a closeness to Hashem beyond anything we can imagine. Yet a single hour

of תשובה and מעשים טובים in this world is greater still. A מצוה performed here, in this world, is a greater דביקות with הקב"ה.

That is the lesson of Avraham Avinu at the opening of his tent. When he ran to his guests he did not leave the שכינה behind; he embraced it more fully. And so it is with every מצוה we do: it is not an interruption of our closeness to Hashem, but its fullest expression.

Shabbos Day

"אל תביט אחריך": Encouragement Without Comparison

As the מלאכים lead Lot and his family out of Sedom before its destruction, they command him: "המלט על נפשך אל תביט אחריך", "Flee for your life; do not look behind you" (בראשית יט, יז). Lot's wife did look back: "ותבט אשתו מאחריו ותהי נציב מלח", "His wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (בראשית יט, כו). The Rav did not dwell on why she became specifically a pillar of salt; that is a subject for another time. He focused instead on the command itself: "אל תביט אחריך", do not look behind you.

Every night in השכיבנו we ask: "והסר שטן מלפנינו ומאחרינו", "Remove the שטן from before us and from behind us." There is a שטן that stands behind a person as well. The Rav explained that in יידישקייט we must focus all the strength we have on what lies in front of us. We cannot be looking around at other people.

The Rav does not often quote ליקוטי מוהר"ן, but this time he did. Avraham Avinu was a great idealist; he set out to bring the entire world to Hashem, and when Hashem promised him wealth and renown, he took up the mission with all of it. What, then, was the secret of his עבודת ה'? The Rav read the השמטה known as "אחד היה אברהם", in which Rebbe Nachman writes (ליקוטי מוהר"ן, השמטה שלפני תנינא):

> "אחד היה אברהם". שאברהם עבד ה' רק על ידי שהיה אחד, שחשב בדעתו שהוא רק יחידי בעולם, ולא הסתכל כלל על בני העולם, שסרים מאחרי ה' ומונעים אותו, ולא על אביו ושאר המונעים, רק כאילו הוא אחד בעולם, וזהו: "אחד היה אברהם". וכן כל הרוצה לכנוס בעבודת ה', אי אפשר לו לכנוס כי אם על ידי בחינת שיחשוב שאין בעולם כי אם הוא לבדו יחידי בעולם, ולא יסתכל על שום אדם המונעו, כגון: אביו ואימו או חותנו ואישתו ובניו וכיוצא, או המניעות שיש משאר בני העולם, המלעיגים ומסיתים ומונעים מעבודתו יתברך. וצריך שלא יחוש ויסתכל עליהם כלל, רק יהיה בבחינת: "אחד היה אברהם" כאילו הוא יחיד בעולם כנ"ל
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> "אחד היה אברהם", Avraham was one (יחזקאל לג, כד). Avraham served Hashem only by being "one": he considered in his mind that he was alone in the world, and he paid no attention at all to the people of the world who had turned away from Hashem and were holding him back, neither to his father nor to anyone else who stood in his way, but acted as if he were the only one in the world. This is the meaning of "אחד היה אברהם". So too, whoever wishes to enter into the service of Hashem cannot enter except by considering that there is no one in the world but himself alone. He must not look at any person who holds him back, such as his father and mother, his father-in-law, his wife and children and the like, or the obstacles that come from the rest of the world, those who mock, entice and hold him back from serving Hashem. He must pay them no heed and not look at them at all, but be in the aspect of "אחד היה אברהם", as if he were alone in the world.

The Rav explained that this does not mean a person should disregard his father and mother. It means that what he does in life must be his own. It should be done because he himself is the one pushing it forward. A person may certainly draw encouragement

from others, whether in רוחניות or in גשמיות: from someone who is strong, someone who is wealthy, someone who learns well. Encouragement, yes; comparison, no.

The Rav told the story of a בחור who was leaving yeshiva to get married. As he left, he turned around to look back, and the בחורים rose and gave him a standing ovation. He had helped build that place. He had something to look back at. Lot had no reason to look back at Sedom. A person must earn the right to look back at what he is leaving, at what he has built.

When we want to grow, the Rav said, we cannot be focused on others. If we focus on others, we lose ourselves. We are forever trying to keep up with the next person and with what he has, and then we no longer see the ברכה we have in our own lives. This is a great mistake even in עבודת ה'. Do not look at what the other person has. Another person learns beautifully? You learn too. Do what you need to do, and be encouraged by him. But it must not become a comparison or a race to keep up, because then we lose our focus and lose count of all the beautiful things we have in our lives.

The Rav brought the words of the גמרא regarding Bilaam, who went to collect his reward for the twenty-four thousand of ישראל who fell through his counsel, and was himself killed. Of this the גמרא quotes the popular saying: "גמלא אזלא למיבעי קרני, אודני דהוו ליה גזיזן מיניה", "The camel went to ask for horns, and the ears it had were cut off" (סנהדרין קו, א). That is what happens when we try to be someone else, when we measure ourselves against the next person. We admire his beautiful horns, and in the end we lose our own ears. We lose sight of the ברכה that is already ours.

Someone has a big house? You should not want to build a big house because he has one. If you have your own reasons to build a big house, wonderful. If you have your own reasons to build a big business, wonderful. But do not do it in order to compare yourself to others, because then you will lose sight of all the beautiful things you already have.

The Rav told of someone he knows who had many good things going on in his life. One day an acquaintance of his said to him, "If only I had what you have." He answered: "If you want what I have, you have to take the whole package. I don't think you want the whole package." We look at other people and see only part of the picture. And even if we believe we see all of it, we must not look at others in order to compare. Comparison is where the danger lies. Look, be encouraged, be מחוזק by what you see, and then do it on your own, for your own reasons.

Then, the Rav concluded, something beautiful happens. When we focus on our own path and do not look behind us, we are able to see the beauty and the ברכה in our own lives, and we can be truly happy for another person who has his ברכה as well.

Shalosh Seudos

"וישב אברהם אל נעריו": The Lofty Person and the Great Person

On the way to the עקידה, Avraham took with him two young men, whom Rashi identifies as Yishmael and Eliezer (רש"י בראשית כב, ג). At the foot of the mountain he left them behind: "שבו לכם פה עם החמור ואני והנער נלכה עד כה", "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder" (בראשית כב, ה). Father and son went up alone, "וילכו שניהם יחדו" (בראשית כב, ו). After the עקידה the Torah says: "וישב אברהם אל נעריו ויקמו וילכו יחדו אל באר שבע", "Avraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Be'er Sheva" (בראשית כב, יט).

This entire episode took place on הר המוריה. The עקידה was the greatest event in the history of כלל ישראל and the greatest moment of Avraham Avinu's life. It was the last and greatest of his עשרה נסיונות (אבות ה, ג), and he withstood it, ready to offer up his own son.

The verse says "וישב", in the singular, and not "וישובו", they returned. Going up, the Torah wrote "וילכו שניהם יחדו", the two of them together; coming back, it speaks of Avraham alone. חז"ל take note of this: "ויצחק היכן הוא?", "And where was Yitzchak?" The מדרש answers that Avraham had sent him to Shem to learn Torah (בראשית רבה נו, יא), and the תרגום יונתן on this verse says that Yitzchak remained there, in the בית מדרש of Shem, for three years. Avraham came down by himself.

Yet what is the significance of "וישב אברהם אל נעריו"? Why does the Torah stress that Avraham returned to his young men? The Rav explained that Avraham Avinu came back from the holiest and loftiest experience imaginable, and he was able to return to his נערים: to come down to the level of Yishmael and Eliezer, to be with them once again, and to go on, to continue onward in life.

The Rav mentioned the קדושת לוי that was learned Shabbos morning (קדושת לוי, ליקוטים, לפרשת וירא). The קדושת לוי writes of בעלי תשובה who are "קדושי עליון", for whom every day brings a new illumination; in that new light they see that yesterday fell short, and so "בכל יום הוא עושה תשובה על יום אתמול", "every day he does תשובה for the day before." A person grows every day. He is a different person today, a greater one, and so he regrets things from yesterday that, by today's standard, were not what they should have been. Each day we become a newer person.

How much more so Avraham Avinu after the עקידה. He had just been ready to give up his son's life, he had stood firm in this נסיון, and he was now a different person entirely. And yet: "וישב אברהם אל נעריו". He came back.

The Rav compared this to אהרן הכהן. After Hashem commanded the lighting of the מנורה, the Torah says: "ויעש כן אהרן", "And Aharon did so" (במדבר ח, ג). Of course he did! Rashi explains: "להגיד שבחו של אהרן שלא שינה", "to tell the praise of Aharon, that he did not deviate." This may be understood to mean that he never departed from what he was commanded. But it may also be read as: Aharon did not change himself. Immediately after that lofty experience and that wondrous מצוה of the מנורה, he came back down and continued exactly as before, going out to make peace between husband and wife, between friends and between business partners. He could lower himself from

those heights and relate to people where they were. He remained, in the words of the משנה, "אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן לתורה" (אבות א, יב).

The Rav said that there is a difference between a lofty person and a great person. A lofty person is up in the heights, and there he stays. A great person can stand on the greatest heights and still be down here with the people he takes care of. There is a concept of a נשמה כללית, a soul that includes within it every type of person. That is what a great person is: one who can include every kind of person.

This, said the Rav, is the meaning of Avraham Avinu's tent, open on all four sides. Avraham's house was open "לארבע רוחות העולם", to the four directions of the world (ברטנורא אבות א, ה). The Rav has explained before that this was not merely a matter of geography, of being reachable from every direction. It meant that Avraham was able to bring in every type of person. Come as you are. And Avraham Avinu was able to take each one and make him great along with him. That is what a great person is, and that is what Avraham Avinu was here. He returned to his young men not as the Avraham who had just performed the overwhelming עבודה of the עקידה, but as the Avraham who could still connect with them and still instill in them.

The Rav noted that there are many views on how a רבי should conduct himself with his תלמידים. What makes him relatable? Must he bring himself down to his students' level? The Rav said that he does not agree with that. A רבי should remain on top. But he must not look down at his students from above; he must understand them and speak to them where they are.

Had Avraham Avinu not come back down, he could not have spoken to his young men where they were. The עקידה was an enormous מדרגה, and still Avraham Avinu was able to return. That is the four open doors of his tent, and that is אהרן הכהן: after receiving the great and wondrous מצוה of the מנורה, he did not change himself. He went on with the עבודה he had been doing all along.

Editorial note

These teachings were prepared from a listener's recollection and are presented in edited form, not as a verbatim transcript. Source references in parentheses were added in preparation.