

11-16-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – VaYera (and He appeared)
Torah Portion; Genesis 18:1 – 22:24
Haftarah: 2 Kings 4:1-37
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Heb 13:1-2

You Are the Light in Darkness

Central question of this message: Are you influencing your community to greater holiness?

We are in the parashah *VaYera*. It means “and He appeared.” The parashah takes its name from the first line of the text, “Now the L-rd appeared to him by the oaks of *Mamre...*”.

Gen 18:1-3

18 And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth 3 and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.

וַיֵּרָא 18:1 אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֲלֵנִי מִמְרָא וְהָיָא
And appeared unto him the Lord in the plains of Mamre: and he
7200 413 3068 436 4471 1931

יָשָׁב פֶּתַח- הָאֵהָל כָּתָם הַיּוֹם:
sat in door the tent in the heat of the day;
3427 6607 168 2527 3117

וַיִּשָּׂא ² עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים
And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men
5375 5869 7200 2009 7969 376

נִצְבִּים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיָּרָץ לִקְרֹאתָם
stood by him: when he saw them, and he ran to meet them
5324 5921 7200 9999 7323 7125

מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה:
from door, the tent and bowed himself toward the ground,
6607 168 7812 776

וַיֹּאמֶר ³ אֲדֹנָי אִם- נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל-
And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, not
559 113 518 4994 4672 2580 5869 408

נָא תַּעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ:
I pray thee, pass away, from thy servant:
4994 5674 5921 5650

Our people have had many discussions over the generations regarding these three visitors. The discussions revolve around the identity of these beings, and the use of the 4-letter Name.

A popular interpretation is that G-d visited Abram, and even before G-d could speak His message, three visitors came up. Abraham then interrupted G-d and insisted upon an act of hospitality before he would allow G-d to continue speaking. It is from this interpretation that our people have determined that hospitality is a higher mitzvah even than a visitation from G-d.

Although I believe hospitality is a mitzvah, I don't believe it is worthy of higher honor than a visitation from the Holy One. That simply doesn't make sense to me at all. But there is another interpretation of this passage which not only makes sense, but gives us another lesson along the way as well.

There is no doubt that these are angelic beings, at a minimum. It is clear from the passage that Avram refers to one of them as L-rd – the 4-letter Name for G-d. It is also clear that that one of them receives worship. We know that the Father did not appear to Avram, because no man has seen His face and survived. But this being did accept worship. We know that no holy angel will accept worship, so this one with the two angels must be none other than Yeshua.

And Yeshua, together with the two angels, eats what Avram served them. This passage gives us some idea how it might be that people have

provided hospitality to angels without being aware that they were doing so.

Heb 13:1-2

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

The remarkable thing about these beings is that they were in many ways identical to people, as they existed during that time. Beyond looking just like men, they walked, left footprints, cast shadows, and could eat a meal. The one thing that is startling about them from this passage is that they didn't simply "come walking up" to Avram. They just "appeared" in front of him, apparently "out of thin air." And that leads us to the next lesson from this parashah. The lesson of the holy influence.

Gen 18:22–33

22 So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. 23 Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death

with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" 26 And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." 27 Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." 29 Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." 30 Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." 31 He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." 32 Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." 33 And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

If we can agree that Yeshua Himself was in this group of three, then the first remarkable thing we find is that Yeshua remained behind to talk a

bit more with Avram. The second thing we find remarkable is that Avram began negotiating with whom he knew to be the one bearing the holy Name in person, for the lives of those in S'dom.

Avram begins with 50, and reduces the number by 10 each time until he is certain he cannot successfully bargain down any further. Finally, the number of righteous in the city for which the L-rd will not destroy it – is 10.

Let's look at this from another angle. I don't know the population of the city at that time, but it was a city big enough to have a town square, and if you were struck blind, you would have a difficult time finding your way home again. So, it was no small city.

When you look at the ratio of good to wicked in the city, does it make sense to spare thousands of wicked for the sake of 50 tzaddikim? Much less 10?

Why wouldn't Avram simply ask G-d to get the 50 righteous out of the city so it could be swept away with no righteous being harmed? But in the negotiation, Avram is asking that an entire city full of wicked people be spared because 10 righteous live there.

This has caused significant discussion among our sages as well. The consensus seems to be that Avram was engaging in a presumption

regarding those he drew within the circle of “righteous” for purposes of making his plea to G-d. He was presuming that these 10, if they live holy lives in public in a way that is consistent with G-d, but in sharp contrast to their society, then their witness will be strong enough to eventually turn the entire city to G-d. And, in the end... G-d agrees. This doesn't mean that we need to be haughty, and going about clanging bells so that people will notice our righteousness. The best practice is to be genuine – the same in private and public. That takes far less energy than required to be two separate people in separate conditions. Everyone in this congregation is at a different spiritual level. That is expected, and it is right. We each need to grow, and help one another grow.

The lesson for us today is this. It is insufficient for us to be privately righteous. In order to function as a savior of our city, we must be publicly righteous.

This doesn't mean that we need to be haughty, and going about clanging bells so that people will notice our righteousness. The best practice is to be genuine – the same in private and public. That takes far less energy than required to be two separate people in separate conditions. Everyone in this congregation is at a different spiritual level. That is expected, and it is right. We each need to grow, and help one another grow.

And we can identify possibly one or two in our congregations which we might believe have truly reached the exalted status of a “tzaddik.” But what if there are none? Does that mean that our city is subject to being destroyed? It does not.

In the second parashah of our cycle, we find that Noah was saved, together with all his family, because he was more righteous than the rabble around him. He wasn’t perfect, but he didn’t need to be. His heart was turned to G-d, and that was what G-d looked at.

I find that too many of us have a tendency to focus on our shortcomings and failings. It is true that we do fail. But it is my hope that from one Yom Kippur to the next, you have a bit less to repent for, and more to intercede for.

In contrast, G-d seems to focus more on our strengths, our talents, and our willingness to simply show up, and do what He says to do. I can tell you that I am totally incapable of doing what G-d has called me to do. But that doesn’t matter, does it? Whenever I follow G-d’s leading to do something I personally can’t do, it somehow still gets done.

In being of service to the King, what matters first is showing up. Nobody ever does anything without first showing up.

Then, keep the right attitude throughout the rest of the task. Of course we can be called to tasks which are difficult. Of course our efforts often take longer to produce results than anyone expected. Of course there is opposition arising to accomplish our work. Do any of these sound familiar? If not, then you haven't been working in G-d's service long enough.

Have you never yet stepped-out to do something important and holy? Have you done so, but haven't done so in a long time? Then, it is time you consider stepping forward. Don't spend too much time on the bench, or simply watching the game in the bleachers. Get onto the field.

Are you afraid of failure? G-d isn't afraid of it, so why would you be? If He is with you, who is against you? Let's look how Isaiah dealt with a tasking from G-d.

Isa 6:8

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Note that he didn't say, "who am I, L-rd... *don't send me!*"

So, what are we to learn from these passages?

First of all, G-d can just “show up” into your life at a time you least expect it. And He is not opposed to you bargaining a bit with him on some things.

But mostly, you don’t have to be one of the highest holy ones in order to serve G-d in a public way. You simply have to answer the call.

And it is important for us to understand that when He has called us to do things that we know we cannot do alone, we won’t have to do them alone. G-d is with us. If we keep our eyes on G-d, we *can* step out of the boat and walk on the water.

What may be one of the ironies of our age, the “church” in Iran is the fastest-growing of anywhere. People are seizing the good news and become instant missionaries, taking the good news to other people. They have not studied Torah. They have only accepted Yeshua as their Passover Lamb, and they know that very well. Their outreach is working very well. They are operating without fear because they have already given up their lives on the altar of faith, and if they walk out the door and don’t come back tonight, that is ok, because they have already planned for that. It is that kind of courage that advances the kingdom in a place which is the seat of so much evil in our world.

Are you comfortable in your seat? Remember this, Yeshua came to comfort the afflicted.... And to afflict the comfortable.

There is a great harvest coming.

Is 66:15–21.

“For behold, the LORD will come in fire,
and his chariots like the whirlwind,
to render his anger in fury,
and his rebuke with flames of fire.

16 For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment,
and by his sword, with all flesh;
and those slain by the LORD shall be many.

17 “Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the
gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig’s flesh and the
abomination and mice, shall come to an end together,
declares the LORD. 18 “For I know their works and their
thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and
tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, 19 and
I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send
survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw
the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that
have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall

declare my glory among the nations. 20 And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on camels, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. 21 And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

The L-rd of the harvest is sending workers into His fields. You are those workers. Pray. Then stand up. Then walk.