

Maamarei Mordechai

הסביר לפי ממש פשט

Parshas Vayera 5786

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Hashem appeared to Avraham.

וַיַּרְא אֶלְיוֹן הַבְּאַלְמָנִי מִמְּרֵא וְהִיא יִשְׁבֶּן פֶּתַח־הַאֲחָל בְּתִים הַיּוֹם:

“And Hashem appeared to him, in the plains of Mamrei, and He settled at the opening of his tent, as if the heat of the day.” (Bereishis 18:1).

The traditional translation of this pasuk is that “he” – Avraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. This is based on the Gemara. (Bava Metzia 86a). However, many only look at the snippets that Rashi quotes and miss a very important note that changes the entire interpretation of the narrative. The Gemara says that it was Hashem that was in the doorway.

This pasuk follows the narrative of Perek 17. During that narrative, Hashem appeared to Avram (before his name change). (Ibid 17:1). During this appearance Hashem made a pact with Avram. (Ibid 17:2). Avram fell on his face. (Ibid 17:3). Hashem changed his name to Avraham. (Ibid 17:5). He promised to make Avraham exceedingly fertile and numerous. (Ibid 17:6). The pact was that the Land would be given to Avraham and his children, he will be made great, and his children will keep the pact forever. (Ibid 17:9). The pact’s symbolic gesture was circumcision. (Ibid 17:10).

It is important to note that Hashem—with that name, His relationship with mankind—appeared to Avram. Hashem also changed Avram’s name. Then, as Elokim—His relationship to the natural world—He told Avraham about the bris. (Ibid 17:9). Then, as Elokim he also changed Sarei’s name to Sarah (ibid 17:15) and gave her the blessing for her to give Avraham a child (ibid 17:16). With this, he changed her nature. Then Avraham, in his new status, also fell on his face and he celebrated. (Ibid 17:18). He requested that Yishmael also live before Hashem. (Ibid). Elokim promises that the bris will be maintained with Yitzchok and his children after him. (Ibid 17:19). This made the pact part of Creation. As requested, Hashem also blessed Yishmael. (Ibid 17:20). Yitzchok would be born in one year hence. (Ibid 17:21). Afterwards, Avraham took Yishmael and his household members and they all were circumcised. (Ibid 17:23).

Then Chapter 18 picks up the same narrative and elaborates on it. The original narrative gave the overall promises. Then the Torah gives specifics about the vision that Avram/Avraham saw.

Avraham’s name is not used until pasuk 6. The first five pesukim are when Avraham was still Avram – prior to his name change. But once his name was changed the Torah did not want to reuse the old name. “Hashem appeared to him [Avram]” just as stated in 17:1. (Ibid 18:1). In 17:1 it used Avram’s age. Now it uses the location - the plains of Mamrei.

Prior to this vision, Yishmael was born when Avram was 86. (Ibid 16:16). Earlier it said that Avram was a temporary dweller in the plains of Mamrei. (Ibid 14:13). The pasuk

explains that Mamrei was an Amorite that made a covenant with Avram. Between then and pasuk 18:1 there is no other location given for Avram. The Torah is likely giving the additional information of the location, not because he had moved and returned to the plains of Mamrei, but because the location is significant again. The last time he was there the Torah said he had to join the battle of the Five Kings versus the Four Kings. (Ibid 14:15). He returned and met the King of Sodom. (Ibid 14:17). Now, again, Sodom would be in trouble. (Ibid 18:20).

Another reason it says plains of Mamrei is because despite Avram saving the Land of Canaan from desolation by the Four Kings, he refused to take any material possessions. (Ibid 14:23). Yet, he did reward Mamrei with loot for joining him. (Ibid 14:24). Even after Hashem's promises to Avram at the Pact of the Split Parts (ibid 15:10) and even as Hashem appeared to him now, he was still just living on Mamrei's land.

"And He settled at the tent's opening." Hashem does not sit or reside in something. Hashem is beyond the natural world. However, Hashem settled there as a vision.

"Like the heat of the day." The vision was like the heat of the day. When one looks out over hot sand or stone in the heat of the day, there is a shimmer caused by the heat. Unlike with Moshe (and Adam in Eden Garden), whenever Hashem appeared to all others it was through a vision. Either the person was sleeping or would have a vision and the vision would "speak" to the person. The exception is when a Malakh would talk for Hashem. (Ibid 22:15). Here, Avram saw this vision during the daytime. The vision was at his tent opening he saw a shimmer like the heat of the day.

The next pasuk says, "And he raised his eyes and he saw [the vision], and Behold! Three men standing and waiting on him. He saw [the men] and he ran towards them from the tent opening [the vision], and he bowed to the ground." (Ibid 18:2). The Gemara says the men were first standing over Avram and then they were far away. (Bava Metzia 86a). Avram lifted up his eyes and he saw the vision, the heat of the day. Behold—this connotes a surprise as he was viewing a vision. There were three men that were standing at attention on him—they were waiting for the vision to end. He ran toward them, but also bowed to the ground. Avram fell on his face when Hashem appeared. (Ibid 17:3). Avraham fell on his face again. (Ibid 17:17). This is his bowing to the ground here. Avraham asked Hashem's pardon to deal with his guests. (Ibid 18:3). That is why Avraham rushed so much. (Ibid 18:6,7). Then Hashem picks up the pact with 18:10, which is like 17:21. Then until 18:15 the Torah fleshes out the details of the news of Sara's son. Hashem finished the vision and went up from Avraham. (Ibid 17:22). Then the men left (Ibid 18:16). Avraham and his household "on that very day" conducted their circumcisions. (Ibid 17:26). Then Hashem came back down to check on Sodom (ibid 18:21) and tell the news to Avraham (ibid 18:22).

Every detail of the Torah is important. The Torah teaches that Hashem came to Avraham in a familiar place, his tent opening. He came specifically because of Avraham's faith in Him that Avraham did nothing to try to gain the Land for himself. He resolved to be a guest until Hashem gave the Land to him. Attending to his guests proved that Avraham would be a wise and just landowner.