



Vayera: Companionship & Consolation

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

Now the Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent when the day was hot (Genesis 18:1).

Old habits are hard to break. Our patriarch, Avraham was a true embodiment of the attribute of *chesed*, *loving-kindness*. He spent his years reaching out and forging bonds with others in an effort to bring them closer to God and to one another. And so it comes as no surprise when only a few days after his circumcision we find Avraham sitting at the entrance of his tent in the middle of a blistering day eagerly looking for guests to welcome into his home. Three angelic visitors, disguised as desert nomads appeared, were ushered in and told Avraham and Sarah they were going to have a son. When learning this story our attention is drawn to the angelic emissaries, their missions and the events that unfold over the rest of the parsha. We often overlook the first event the Torah recalls – revelation. God appeared to Avraham. But there is something missing. In most instances Divine Revelation is followed by dialogue. When God appears to someone it is usually to convey a message or a set of instructions, yet here, God appears but there is no dialogue or conversation with Avraham. What was the purpose of this Divine appearance and encounter?

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook *zt"l* (1865-1935) explains that to understand the nature of this revelation was must go back to the events in last week's Parsha. God commanded Avraham to circumcise himself and the members of his household. This "*bris*" was to create a physical covenant between God and the Abrahamitic family. Avraham was scared. Not scared of the pain or discomfort, but scared of the ramifications this newly issued command would have upon his life's work. The *Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 47)* states, "*Avraham said (to God), until now people would come to me, now they will stop coming.*" Avraham's success in disseminating the message of God was in great part due to his ability to connect with people. He understood them; he grew up among them and he possessed a keen appreciation for their realities and struggles. The people who visited Avraham saw in him a person whom they could relate to and as such were receptive to his monotheistic message. However, when God commanded Avraham to perform the *Bris*, Avraham feared that people would hear about this strange form of allegiance to the Divine and would distance themselves from him. After all who has ever heard of such a thing? The people would say, "*If we maintain a relationship with Avraham, he may try to impose this practice on us.*" Avraham realized that the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah* would separate him both physically and spiritually from the people around him and in doing so limit his ability to impact others. Rav Kook explains that Avraham felt he had to choose between listening to God and effectively impacting others. Avraham actually contemplated disobeying the circumcision command so that he would be more effective in spreading the message and word of God throughout civilization. Ultimately, Avraham (with good advice from *Mamre*) chose to adhere to the command of God and readied himself for estrangement from the greater community of mankind.

We like to fit in. We find comfort and security in being part of a group; whether it is within a family unit, a community or a peer group. But there are times in life when we must take a stand. There are times in life when we must do or accomplish something even though it may estrange or separate us from those around us. There are times when we must make unpopular decisions, simply because they are the right decisions to make. But it is hard to stand alone; it is hard to feel separated from the collective.

Herein lies the beautiful message of the opening phrase of our Parsha. After the *Bris* Avraham felt so isolated and alone and it was in that very moment that the Torah says, *VA'YERA ELAV HASHEM, God appeared to him* - there is no dialogue because this is a not a dialogical revelation, it is a companionship revelation. God is not in Avraham's tent to give him instructions or a message, He is there to show Avraham that he is not alone, that he will never be alone. It is through this revelation that God teaches Avraham and his offspring a very important lesson. God whispers to us, "*My dear children, in those very moments when you feel alone, forsaken and estranged from those around you because of the difficult decisions you had to make - know that I am with you, I am holding your hand; I am by your side and always will be.*"