

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת וירא

יקח נא מעט מים ורחצו רגליכם והשענו תחת העץ

“Let some water be brought and wash your feet and recline beneath the tree” (18:4)

The Malbim writes that Avraham Avinu’s focus was to assist everyone physically and spiritually. This is why he constantly sought out guests. He felt that that his guest was doing something good for him by eating of his bread. Chazal reinforced this mindset when they taught that the guest does more for the host than vice versa. We can now understand how Avraham could be so gracious and kind and serve his guests in such a remarkable fashion. He truly understood how much he was gaining from his guests and how much he owed them for giving him the opportunity to perform the mitzvah to invite guests into one’s home.

ויטע אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם ה' קל עולם

“He planted a tree in Beer Sheva and there he proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe” (21:33)

Seforno explains that the title קל עולם means that Hashem is involved in the world and does not take a backseat to history. Avraham promoted this ideology to a society which, for the most part, believed that Hashem had no active role in the world and instead let nature run its course. This is the understanding of Hashem that Avraham proclaimed to the world.

The Meshech Chochma says that קל עולם means that Hashem will endure forever. This title is specifically used for Hashem at this point in time, after the birth of Yitzchak. Before Yitzchak was born, Avraham was concerned that there would be nobody to carry on his mission after his death and that the knowledge of Hashem would go to the grave with him without having been spread to the rest of the world. Now that Yitzchak was born, the child that Hashem had promised would be the father of the Jewish nation, Avraham was assured that the knowledge of Hashem would live on forever. The spiritual future of the world was ensured for all time with the

birth of Yitzchak and so now Avraham gave Hashem the title of “G-d for all eternity.”

ויאמר אברהם אל נעריו שבו לכם פה עם החמור ואני והנער נלכה עד כה ונשתחוה ונשובה אליכם

“And Avraham said to his young men: Stay here by yourselves with the donkey, while I and the lad will go yonder; we will worship and we will return to you” (22:5)

Why did Avraham tell the young men not to accompany him any further? The Malbim says that this test, the עקידת יצחק, was different than everything which Avraham had done up until now. Everything that he had done had been logical and so he did it openly in order that people should recognize Hashem and learn to serve Him. However, this command was counterintuitive. Until now, he would rebuke idolaters for sacrificing their children to their deities and tell them that Hashem did not want this abomination. He taught that there was nothing worse than bloodshed in Hashem’s eyes. But now, here he was, on his way to sacrifice his own son on the command of Hashem. While he felt that he had to follow the word of Hashem unquestionably, he was embarrassed to do it front of others. He did not want them to witness what he was about to do and mistakenly learn from him that sacrificing children was acceptable. He was only doing it out of his great love even though he instinctively understood it to be an abomination. Because of this, he hid the matter from the men who accompanied him on his journey.

כי ברך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי השמים וכחול אשר על שפת הים וירש זרעך את שער איביו

“I shall surely bless you and greatly increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens and like the sand on the seashore; and your offspring shall inherit the gate of its enemy” (22:17)

Why are Bnei Yisrael alternately compared to stars, sand and dirt? The Kli Yakar explains that these three metaphors refer to Bnei Yisrael in different stages of history.

The stars refer to a time when the Jews will be successful and in a position of greatness, just as the stars shine brightly in the sky above the world. This is why the posuk says, “I will increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens,” as another meaning of אַרְבֵּה is “I will make you great.”

The sand is a reference to a time when the enemies of the Jewish people rise up against them. Just as the sand stops the mighty waves of the ocean, similarly the enemies of the Jewish people will never be able to overcome them. This is why, when confronted by Eisav, Yaakov davened to Hashem and urged him to remember His promise to make his children as the sand of the sea. Yaakov was invoking Hashem’s promise never to allow his descendants to be conquered by their enemies.

The earth is a reference to when the Jews are in a low position. Just as people step on the earth but the earth remains intact, so too the Jewish people will always survive. Not only that, but the earth spreads everywhere, just as the Jewish people grow and expand.

With these three metaphors, Hashem promised to perpetually provide special protection and care for Avraham’s descendants. In both good times and bad, Hashem is there for us and watching over us. We can always be confident that Hashem will make us as the stars, the sand or the earth and that we will survive everything.