

Shabbat 31 October – Sedra Vayera

The Sedra begins with a strange sequence of events. We encounter Avraham on the third day after his circumcision, sitting at the opening of his tent in the Oaks of Mamre, and G-d appears to him. However before the onset of any dialogue between G-d and Avraham, the story line seems to break off in mid sentence. Avraham sees three men who are standing above him. He runs to greet them and notice the emphasis: *He offers them water, he takes bread, he washes their feet. He slaughters a cow, he prepares the food. He runs to Sarah to tell her to prepare cakes.*

And then he stands above them, as the three men partake of his generosity.

After telling him the miraculous news of the impending birth of their son, they go on their way. It is only after this event that Avraham resumes his conversation with G-d where He reveals His intention to destroy the town of Sodom.

At first glance one could think it a bit of a *Chutzpah* of Avraham to break off in mid sentence from dialogue with G-d and to occupy himself with the mundane business of looking after these three travellers.

Yet our Sages didn't look at it in a negative way at all. On the contrary, they learn a very important ruling from this event. They say the following; the mitzvah of hospitality, welcoming people into our homes and our communities with warmth and enthusiasm is so great that it outweighs the receiving of the countenance of G-d-because that was exactly what Avraham did.

Here we see Avraham sitting at the entrance of his tent- he's in pain. God comes to visit him, to hasten his cure, yet Avraham says "hold on a second, I've got this mitzvah to do- I'll get back to You"- and it's only after these wayfarers have gone on their way that the narrative returns to the dialogue between G-d and Avraham.

So what do we learn from all of this? Number one; note the emphasis here, it was Avraham who ran to greet them, to wash their feet and do all the other mundane aspects of the mitzvah. The message is simple. Avraham had every reason not to go out of his way to help them. He had just experienced his circumcision at an advanced age, he needed healing. He was a man of high calibre. However we learn from Avraham that nobody should think of himself as too high or elevated to go out of his way to help.

Second: The precept of hospitality elevates us. At the outset, the three wayfarers stood above Avraham, but after he had performed the mitzvah with such conscientiousness and enthusiasm, he stood above them under the tree as they ate.

Finally, where do we get the inspiration to do all this? In Psalm 145 we read "You open your hand and satisfy the desire of all living beings." Ultimately it is G-d Himself who is the supreme host, who sustains life and gives food to all His creatures. It is in this spirit that Avraham emulated G-d and allowed him to get on with the mitzvah whilst G-d waited in the background.

Have a wonderful Shabbat