דרכים בפרשה
וירא

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וישא עיניו ויראה והנה שלשה אנשים

Avraham lifted his eyes and saw three men

The Rambam, in Hilchos Avel (14:1–2), describes Avraham Avinu's path of chesed. He writes that Avraham would feed wayfarers, give them drink, and accompany them on their way. The Rambam then adds, גדולה הכנסת אורחים מהקבלת פני שכינה, welcoming guests is greater than receiving the Shechinah.

There is something interesting about the pasuk the Rambam chooses as his source. The Gemara in Shabbos 127a learns this lesson from Avraham's request to Hashem, אל נא תעבר מעל עבדך. Avraham was in the middle of receiving the Shechinah, yet he asked Hashem to wait while he went to welcome his guests.

The Rambam, however, brings an earlier pasuk: וירא והנה שלשה אנשים. Avraham lifted his eyes and saw three men standing nearby.

Why does the Rambam choose this pasuk? What is he teaching us by emphasizing that Avraham saw the visitors?

The Seforim Hakedoshim explain that there is a deeper dimension to הכנסת אורחים. There is a difference between providing someone with what he needs and making him feel that he matters. When someone is hungry, we give him food. When someone needs help, we try to assist him. These are important acts of chesed, but הכנסת אורחים involves something more. The guest should feel that the host is genuinely interested in him, that he is wanted, and that his presence matters. He should feel seen, not simply accommodated. The host is not just taking care of a guest; he is showing genuine care for the person who is there.

This helps us understand why the Rambam emphasizes not only feeding and giving drink, but also ליווי (levaya), accompanying the guest on his way. When a guest is eating, he needs the meal. When he is staying overnight, he needs a place to sleep. But when he is leaving, accompanying him may not provide him with anything practical. The levaya shows that the host's concern goes beyond the practical task of providing for a guest. He is interested in the person himself. He wants the guest to feel that he is not simply being taken care of, but that he is genuinely valued and seen.

This is also why the story with the three malachim is such a powerful example. The malachim did not need food or drink. They were not hungry or thirsty. If the greatness of Avraham's hospitality were measured only by the practical benefit he provided, this would be a strange example. The point is that הכנסת אורחים is about much more than just filling a need. It is about the warmth and attention with which a person welcomes someone else. Even when there was no physical need to satisfy, Avraham's guests were welcomed with genuine care.

And this brings us back to the Rambam's choice of words. He does not begin with Avraham asking Hashem to wait. He begins with וירא והנה שלשה אנשים. Avraham saw them. Even while experiencing גילוי שכינה, he noticed the people standing before him and immediately turned his attention toward them. He did not see them as an interruption to what he was doing. He saw an opportunity to express chesed.

There is an important lesson here in the way we approach chesed. Sometimes we treat it almost like another item on our to-do list. We did a favor, helped someone out, or gave someone something, and we can happily check it off. We can almost imagine a little boy coming home and asking his mother to write him a mitzvah note on a sticky note: "Dovid did chesed today!" Excellent. One more mitzvah in the books!

But that is not really what chesed is about. The goal is not simply to be able to say that we did a good deed. The goal is the other person. If we are so busy thinking about the mitzvah we are doing, we might miss the very person we are trying to help. We may have completed our act of chesed, but completely missed the person it was meant for.

Think about a guest who comes to a Shabbos meal. We can make sure there is plenty of food, prepare a comfortable place for him, and take care of all his practical needs. But does he feel welcome? Does he feel that we are genuinely happy to have him? A meal can be perfectly prepared, and yet a guest can still leave feeling like he was the proverbial *cheftza shel mitzvah*- simply another person we had to take care of. The difference is not necessarily in what we provide, but in the attention and warmth with which we provide it.

Perhaps this is the deeper meaning of וירא והנה שלשה אנשים. Avraham did not merely notice three people standing outside his tent. He saw them as people worthy of his attention. Even in the middle of his own extraordinary experience, he was able to turn outward and make room for someone else.

That is the path of chesed that Avraham Avinu established. Not merely to do things for other people, but to make sure that they feel seen. Sometimes the greatest gift we can give another person is not something we can put on a plate or hand to him. It is the feeling that he matters, that he is wanted, and that someone truly sees him.

Good Shabbos, מרדכי ע. אפפעל