

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Vayera 5784

D. Mordechai Schlachter

The visitors inquire about Sarah.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אַיִךְ שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בְּאֶהֱלִי:

“And they said to him, ‘Where is Sarah, your wife?’ And he said, ‘Behold! In the tent.’” (Bereishis 18:9).

Why did the visitors inquire about Sarah? Did more than one have to inquire, as it says, “they said.” The pasuk uses the term “behold” which means a surprise. Why was Avram surprised that Sarah was in the tent if he ran to her in the tent a few pesukim earlier? What is the significance that she was in the tent? What are the dots on אֵלָיו?

Many commentators cite the Gemara’s (Bava Metzia 87a) interpretation that these were ministering angels and they knew where Sarah was but they wanted to call her modesty to Avraham’s attention. They point out that she remained there during the episode out of modesty. However, if this is the *pshat* in the Gemara then there are a few questions. The word אֵיךְ has to be interpreted. The dots above אֵלָיו have to be discussed and the fact that she then overheard the conversation from the door of the tent a few pesukim later has to be reconciled if she remained inside the tent.

“Hashem, the Lord, called out to Adam, and He said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (Bereishis 3:9). The same word אֵיךְ is used there. At the time, Adam was “hiding” in the Garden from Hashem. Was that also a time when Hashem was pointing out a virtue? Further, “And Hashem said to Cain, ‘Where is Hevel, your brother?’” (Ibid 4:9). There, too, it cannot be a virtue because Hevel was dead. The same term אֵיךְ is used.

Also did the commentators retract their interpretation of the Gemara when they read further in our parasha? When Lot hosted these same visitors after they left Avraham and came to Sodom, the people of the town “Called to Lot and they said to him, ‘Where are the men that came to you this night?’” (Ibid 19:5). Clearly those that wanted to kill Lot and his guests were not pointing out a virtue. Also, later in this Parsha, “And Yitzchok said to Avraham, his father, and he said “My father.” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, ‘Behold! We have fire and wood. Where is the sheep for a burnt offering?’” (Ibid 22:7). Both instances using the exact word אֵיךְ. Further, Yehuda inquired about the supposed mystery woman that he met and he asked, “where is she” with the same term. (Ibid 38:21). He wanted his belongings back.

This term אֵיךְ does not simply mean where is the person’s physical location. For that we have the term אֵינֶה. This was used by Yoseph when asking after his brothers’ whereabouts. (Ibid 37:16). Yoseph, there, was on a mission to locate his brothers’ physical location. However, when Hashem inquired after Adam and Hevel, clearly Hashem knew where Adam was and that Hevel was dead. The word does not mean “where is she” but rather what is her status.

Yitzchok was not asking where the korban. He was along the three-day journey just as Avraham was. Avraham was not hiding a sheep on his person. Yitzchok was asking “Who or what is the olah?” Same with the people of Sodom. They knew where the guests were. They wanted to know, “Can we molest them as per our town’s custom of cruelty or will you sacrifice others instead for our pleasure?” (Ibid 19:5).

The visitors knew where Sarah was. וַיִּמְהַר אַבְרָהָם הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-שָׂרָה. “And Avraham hurried to the tent, to Sarah.” (Ibid 18:6). If she was preparing bread where else would she be? Her being in the tent, happenstance, especially on a hot day (ibid 18:1), is expected. It points out no virtue of Sarah’s at all. Further, asking for a physical location of Sarah was not only rude (inquiring about one’s wife) but it was pointless. She most likely was in the tent just where Avraham wanted her to be to prepare the dough.

Those that interpret the Gemara as pointed out previously, also seem to ignore the pesukim prior to these. Hashem changes Sarah’s name. (Ibid 17:15). He promises to bless Sarah and give Avraham a son through her. (Ibid 17:16). “My covenant will withstand through Yitzchok, that will be born to you, whom Sarah shall bear to term at this time, next year.” (Ibid 17:21). The Torah already taught that Hashem promised Avraham a son, to be named Yitzchok, who will be born to Sarah. After it reiterates that Hashem told them He would return (or the ministering angel will return) the following year (ibid 18:10) it says that Avraham and Sarah were old and Sarah had experienced menopause (Ibid 18:11). Accordingly, the men were asking Avraham, what is Sarah’s status? Why does she remain in the tent? Why does she listen from the door of the tent? (Ibid 18:10). It is because that same Gemara says that Sarah started to menstruate. The Torah confirmed she was old and passed her childbearing years. Avraham’s objections about Sarah being old (ibid 17:17) is now answered. Sarah is in her tent because the ways of a woman have returned to her. “Because of her modesty” is not a general virtue of modesty but a euphemism that she is dealing with her “woman issues.” She is acting modestly because she experienced menstruation.

Explaining our pasuk. “They said to him.” It was both the visitors and Hashem that asked about Sarah. The visitors, clearly men or the Lord or ministering angels, and Hashem both pointed this out to Avraham. Sarah – what is her status? You see that the promise she will have a child will be fulfilled. It was now up to Avraham to be with her as a husband. He was old (ibid 18:11,12) but Hashem made him fruitful like a young man, too. The dots on the “eilav” are showing they were making a point to Avraham, specifically. Just as the ways of their youth returned to Sarah and Avraham and they can now produce children, so too, all the promises about sovereignty of the Land and worldly blessings will be fulfilled. The brochos would not work without Avraham’s belief and *bitachon* in them.

“Sarah, your wife.” The inquiry is specifically about your wife so that you know you will have with her a legitimate child. Be with her like husband and wife.

“Behold, she is in the tent.” He was confused as to why she did not come out with the dough to bake the bread. Why did she linger in the tent and not greet the visitors? She was taking care of her sudden body change, modestly.

May we be zoiche to be fruitful and successful and all the brochos.