
א ביסל תורה!

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וירא

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אברהם's Great Fear of God and Love For Others

By Josh Canner

This week's פרשת וירא, פרשה, continues on with the tests and endeavors of אברהם אבינו. As the תורה teaches us, אברהם was presented with ten tests from ה' throughout his life. The ten tests ranged from being commanded to leave his homeland to be a stranger in כנען, being commanded to get a ברית מילה at the age of 99, and the most difficult test of being commanded to sacrifice his cherished son, יצחק. No matter how physically distressing or seemingly irrational the tests were, אברהם completed them because of his immense love, fear, and faith in ה'. We see that אברהם was completely devoted to ה' and fulfilling His words.

In the first פסוק of the פרשה, the תורה says that ה' appeared to אברהם: "וירא אליו יקוק" בראשית יח:א. Just as we are supposed to clear our minds of any distracting thoughts, and maintain intent focus on our תפילות when we connect with God in davening, so אברהם was deeply concentrated in his encounter with God. Furthermore, אברהם maintained a very profound level of concentration to ה', much more than we achieve in our prayers, in his meeting with him. This makes it hard to understand the subsequent verse: "וַיִּשָׂא: "עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיִּרָץ לְקִרְבָּתָם מִפְּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה: " ("Looking up, he saw three figures standing near him. Perceiving this, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground" (Berishit 18:2). How could אברהם notice these figures traveling amidst his focussed revelation with ה'? How did אברהם, a man with great fear and devotion to ה', have the audacity to abandon his confrontation with Hashem to tend to these figures?!

These פסוקים aren't teaching us that אברהם was disrespectful and lacked focus in his meeting with Hashem, rather they are teaching us how much אברהם cared about others. אברהם was very focussed on Hashem, and the fact that he noticed these figures shows how sensitive he was towards others.

The חב"ד text, היום יום, teaches in its entry for the 8th of תמוז that ה' cherished אברהם's interpersonal actions more than his spiritual accomplishments and the tests he overcame. From this teaching, we learn that God wasn't mad at אברהם for tending to these figures amidst Their encounter, rather ה' was very proud of אברהם for the kindness he bestowed upon them.

Although these figures were actually angels, אברהם perceived them as humans, and therefore treated them as he would to any human. אברהם and his wife, שרה, prepared them a meal and treated them with great hospitality. From this story of אברהם and שרה's kindness, we learn that we should treat others kindly, and the way we conduct ourselves towards others is valued by ה'.

סדום ועמורה and the Story of מים אחרונים

By Binyamin Orkaby

In this weeks פרשה we are told the story of the destruction of סדום ועמורה. Two angels come to לוט and his family and warn him to leave before the city is destroyed. לוט picks up and leaves with his wife, and two of his daughters and goes to the town of צוער which was near סדום. After לוט gets there ה' destroy's סדום ועמורה and then תורה says מלח תורה and לוט's wife turned around to look at the destruction of the city and was turned into a pillar of salt. When the cities are destroyed the פסוק says וַאֲשֶׁר רָאָה that ה' rained sulfurous fire onto the cities. In פרשת נצבים, ספר דברים, at the end of דברים, ספר דברים, are told that if they don't follow ה' laws than the land will be כְּמֵהִפְלֹת סְדוֹם וְעִמּוֹרָה ... כְּמֵהִפְלֹת סְדוֹם וְעִמּוֹרָה covered in sulfurous salt like the cities of סדום ועמורה.

The גמרא says that this salt is called מלח סדומית which, if it comes in contact with the eyes, can make a person blind (possibly because of its sulfurous content). Therefore the גמרא says that one must wash מים אחרונים so as to cleanse one's hands of this salt. The תוספות in חולין add that it is also because one might wish to be clean before making ברכת המזון.

Nowadays the general אשכנזי opinion is that of the תוספות who say in עירובין דף יז: that nowadays there is no custom for doing מים אחרונים. This according to תוספות is because the salt called מלח סדומית no longer exists and so we no longer have to be worried about it anymore. Today utensils are also used to eat meals and so one's hands don't become dirty from the food and as such no מים אחרונים is necessary.

However, among the עדות המזרח there is a general belief that מים אחרונים is still necessary even today. The רמב"ם says in הלכה ג' that מים אחרונים still exists today and we must still be worried about מלח סדומית, or something which has the same properties as מלח סדומית (to cause someone to be blinded if it goes in one's eye), and to wash hands after eating a meal. The רמב"ם says that because of health one must do מים אחרונים. The שולחן ערוך אור החיים סימן קפא agrees with the רמב"ם, as it almost always does, and says that מים אחרונים is a requirement to do. However, the שולחן ערוך also adds at the end of סימן קפא in הלכה י' that there are some who say that there are some who don't have the custom to do מים אחרונים. He also adds though after he says that even according to this custom if their hands were dirty those people should still wash them to cleanse them from their dirtiness.

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