



# ALSHICH INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת וירא

SERIES 2: ISSUE 4

## AVRAHAM FEEDS HIS GUESTS

### Chapter 18

7) Then Avraham ran to the cattle, took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the youth, and he hurried to prepare it.

ז) וְאֶל הַבָּקָר רַץ אֶבְרָהָם וַיַּקְחֵ בָּן בָּקָר רָךְ וְטוֹב וַיִּתְאַלֵּן אֶל הַנֶּשֶׁר וַיַּמְהַר לְעַשּׂוֹת אֲתָּוֹן.

8) He took some cream and milk and the calf that he had prepared and placed it before [his guests]. And he stood over them under the tree and they ate.

ח) וַיַּקְחֵ חַמְאָה וְחַלְבָן-הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתְאַלֵּן לְפָנֵיכֶם וְהִוא עַמְּדָעַלְיכֶם תְּחִתְּ הַעַץ וַיְאִכְלָוּ.

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 86b) says that the three words *calf*, *tender* and *good* refer to three separate animals that Avraham slaughtered, in order to give each of his three guests a calf's tongue with mustard.

### Consider the following questions:

1. Why did Avraham need to slaughter three animals? Let him give each guest an excellent cut of meat from a single animal!
2. Why does verse 7 say, "and gave it to the youth, and he hurried to prepare **it**," if there were three separate animals? It should use the plural, "them."
3. The same problem recurs in verse 8, where it says "**the calf** that he had prepared" instead of "calves."
4. Since in *Yoma* 28b it states that Avraham kept all the mitzvos, even the Rabbinic ones, why did he serve his guests milk and meat together?
5. Since Avraham's guests were actually angelic beings who had no need for food, why did they eat the food Avraham offered them?

Avraham wanted to treat each of his three guests as being equally important, and he wanted them to know that he regarded them as such. To accomplish this, he had to slaughter a separate animal for each one; and for them to know that he had done so, he had to give them each a tongue (since there is only one per animal). **[This answers Question 1.]**

Avraham needed help to cook the tongues. In order to educate his son in *hachnasas orchim* and enable him to earn merit for fulfilling the mitzvah, he called upon Yishmael - the youth of our verse. Avraham took one tongue to prepare by himself, and gave one to Yishmael, expecting that after Yishmael finished with that one, he would prepare the third as well. **[This answers Question 2.]**

*[Avraham] hurried to prepare it* - but Yishmael was not as quick to do a mitzvah as his father, and did

not finish cooking his tongue by the time Avraham had finished preparing his. Avraham did not want his hungry guests to have to wait any longer, but he had only one tongue ready. Since giving them each a third of a tongue would not be honorable, nor would it demonstrate to his guests that he regarded each of them equally, he therefore took the one *calf* (i.e., the tongue) *that he had prepared to give to only one of his guests*. **[This answers Question 3.]** He also took *cream and milk* to give to the second and third guests, respectively. Each one would thus receive his own respectable, unique dish. [Translators' note: It is possible that in those days (before the invention of the refrigerator), fresh milk and cream were much more of a delicacy than they are today. Otherwise, it would seem that the guests who received the dairy products were less important than the one who received the tongue.] Avraham did not serve cream or milk to the same person who received meat. **[This answers Question 4.]**

The answer to Question 5 is connected to why verse 8 says that Avraham stood "over them" (עליהם) – literally, *on them or above them*). The Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 28:1) says that when Moshe went up to heaven to take the Torah, the angels wanted to harm him. God made Moshe's face look like Avraham's and said to the angels, "Aren't you embarrassed before him? Isn't this the person whom you went down from heaven to visit, and you ate in his house?" The angels then left Moshe alone.

What was so significant about the angels having eaten in Avraham's house that this was enough to convince them to leave Moshe alone and let him take the Torah?

To answer this question, we must understand two things: First, until that point in time, the entire world – that is, the physical world, as well as the heavenly realms, the realms of the angels – had been sustained by Avraham's acts of *chesed*. Second, before Avraham's *bris milah* the Heavenly angels served as the Divine Chariot (the vehicle "carrying" the Divine Presence), but after his *bris milah* God chose **him** to serve as the Divine Chariot. Thus the Torah's statement that "*He [Avraham] stood above them*" means that Avraham stood on a higher spiritual level than the angels and was superior to them. Meanwhile, the apparently extraneous statement in verse 8 that the angels were under the tree hinted to the fact that they were no longer "under" the Divine Presence (as God's Chariot), for now Avraham had taken their place.

Thus, God wanted the angels to eat the food that Avraham served them in order to symbolize to them and to the world that until then Avraham had been keeping them alive. Because Avraham had taken their place in bringing the Presence of God to all of Creation, the angels were humbled and therefore ate. Because Avraham had taken their place in bringing the Presence of God to all of Creation, the angels were humbled and therefore ate. **[This answers Question 5.]**

#### THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 – 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKodosh" (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.