

# ALSHICH

## INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת וירא

16 NOVEMBER 2024

## AVRAHAM'S ELEVATION AND HIS THREE GUESTS

### Chapter 18

2) He raised his eyes and he saw; three men were standing right by him and he saw. He ran towards them from the entrance to the tent and he bowed down to the ground.

(ב) וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיִּרְא וַיִּרְץ לְקִרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה.

3) He said, "My Master, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not move away from upon Your servant."

(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אַל נָא תֵעָבֵר מֵעַל כַּעֲבֹדְךָ.

### Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the verse say "and he saw" twice?
2. Why did Avraham run towards the men when they were standing right by him?
3. Why was he so in awe of them that he bowed down to the ground?
4. When Avraham ran and bowed to his guests, why didn't he speak to them?
5. Why did Avraham say to God, "Please do not 'move away from upon' Your servant"? He should have just said, "Please do not leave Your servant."
6. Why didn't he ask God for permission to deal with the guests before he ran towards them?

To address the questions raised here, we begin by discussing a way that Avraham became elevated through the mitzvah of *bris milah* that emerges from *Bereishis Rabbah* 47:10:

Avraham said to God, "Before I did *bris milah* passersby would come to me. Is it possible that now that I have circumcised myself they will not come any more?" God answered him, "Before you did *bris milah*, uncircumcised people came to you. Now, I will come in My Glory and reveal Myself to you."

Avraham was always more concerned about the rest of the world than about himself. Thus, when God told him to offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice, Avraham did not utter a word in protest. Yet when God told him to perform *bris milah*, he resisted because he feared that as a result of him doing something so strange as altering the human body, people would no longer want to avail themselves of his hospitality. As such, he would no longer be able to fulfill the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* - and our Sages (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:12) have taught us that until the Torah was given the world existed only in the merit of Avraham's acts of kindness. So should not the existence of the world take precedence over this single mitzvah?!

God answered him that, to the contrary, as a result of his *bris milah* his effectiveness in sustaining the world would be far greater than before. There are two basic means through which the world may be sustained. The first one is via Divine *shefa* (spiritual outpouring or blessing) coming down to earth from Above. The second, higher one is through the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) being present ("resting") on the earth itself. The loftiest way this could occur would be if there was a *tzaddik* on earth who was worthy of serving instead of the Heavenly angels as the Chariot that

“carried” the Divine Presence; then there would be no limit to the amount of Divine blessing coming to the world.

Until now, Avraham had fulfilled the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*, and while the merit of this mitzvah had not caused the *Shechinah* to rest on the earth (means #2), it had brought Divine blessing down to earth from Above (means #1). This was enough to sustain the world.

But now, through the mitzvah of *bris milah*, Avraham was elevated to the highest level of all, serving as the Divine Chariot – as the Midrash quotes God as saying: “I will come in My Glory and reveal Myself to you.” While *hachnasas orchim* remained a mitzvah, it was no longer necessary in order to sustain the world; the world would be sustained on a much higher level through Avraham’s elevated state.

Now we can answer our questions:

God appeared to Avraham along with the angels of His Chariot (Gavriel, Micha’el, and Refael). But when He approached Avraham to rest upon him, He clothed the angels in men’s garb, giving Avraham the chance to perform *hachnasas orchim*. The verse says, *He raised his eyes and he saw* – i.e., he saw that he had become the Chariot of the Divine Presence, which was resting upon him from Above. *Three men were standing right by him and he saw* – i.e., when he lowered his gaze to look around, he didn’t see his guests approaching in the normal way. Rather, seemingly out of nowhere, they appeared standing right by him. [\[This answers Question 1.\]](#)

Avraham thus did not know whether his visitors were angels or human beings who could move extremely quickly. He therefore said to himself: “Two great things have happened to me. I have become Hashem’s Chariot and suddenly have the opportunity to do the mitzvah of *gemilus chesed*. If I attend to the mitzvah perhaps the Divine Presence will leave me; but if I ignore my guests while I ask God not to remove His Presence, the visitors may leave as quickly as they came. [\[This answers Question 6.\]](#) And I cannot speak to them before speaking to God, as this would be totally inappropriate!” [\[This answers Question 4.\]](#)

So in case they were human beings, Avraham hinted that he wanted them to stay by running towards them, although they were standing close by. [\[This answers Question 2.\]](#) Then, in case they were angels, *he bowed down to the ground*. He could then feel confident that no matter who they were, they would understand that he greatly desired their presence, even though he had to take care of something else first (namely, speak to God). [\[This answers Question 3.\]](#)

Avraham then said to God, “*Please do not ‘move away from upon’ Your servant,*” meaning: “If these guests are angels, please do not move Your Presence away from me and to them as before my *bris*, for if that happens, I will lose being Your Chariot **and** the mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*. And if these guests are human, please do not remove Your Presence from upon me, and allow me to continue serving as your Chariot while I do the mitzvah of *gemilus chesed*.” [\[This answers Question 5.\]](#)

## THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKadosh” (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

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