



RABBI SHALOM ROSNER

Rav Kehilla, Ohel Ephraim in Nofei HaShemesh

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Rosh Bais Medrash English Speaking Program JCT Machon Lev

Avraham Avinu: The Dayan of Sedom

The opening of *parashat Vayeira* describes one of the most mysterious encounters in the Torah:

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֲלֵי מַמְרָא

Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre.¹

Rashi famously explains that Hashem appeared to Avraham Avinu in order to perform *bikur cholim* after his brit milah. Yet immediately afterward, the Torah states: "וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל" *And he was sitting at the entrance of the tent.²*

Rashi notes that the word "yoshev" (sitting) is written without the letter *vav*, and explains:

בִּיקֻשׁ לַעֲמוּד, אָמַר לוֹ הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁבּ וְאֵנִי אֲעֻמָּד.

Avraham wished to stand, but Hashem said to him: 'Sit, and I will stand.

Rashi then adds a striking comment: "וְאַתָּה סִימָן לְבָנֶיךָ, שְׁעִתִּיד אֲנִי לְהִתְיַצֵּב בַּעֲדָה דִּינִים וְהֵם יוֹשְׁבִין."

This is a sign for your descendants, for in the future I will stand among the judges while they sit."

The source for this idea is the verse:

"אֱלֹהִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדֶת אֵל" - "God stands in the assembly of judges."³



Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l

At first glance, the comparison is difficult to understand. What connection exists between Hashem's visit to Avraham and the image of a Beit Din? Why does Rashi suddenly introduce the concept of judges and judgment?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik⁴ explains that Avraham was indeed functioning as a kind of "dayan" (judge)

at that moment. The Gemara⁵ in Yoma teaches:

"הֲלַל מַחֲיִיב אֶת הָעֲנִיִּים, רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן חֲרִסּוֹם

מַחֲיִיב אֶת הָעֲשִׁירִים, יוֹסֵף מַחֲיִיב אֶת הָרָשָׁעִים."

Hillel obligates the poor, Rabbi Elazar ben Harsom obligates the wealthy, and Yosef obligates those who struggle with temptation.

When a poor person claims that poverty prevented him from learning Torah, Heaven responds: "Were you poorer than Hillel?" When a wealthy person claims that wealth distracted him, he is asked:

3. Tehillim 82:1

4. Rav Hershel Schechter, *Nefesh HaRav*

5. Yoma 35b

1. Bereishit 18:1

2. Ibid

“Were you wealthier than Rabbi Elazar ben Harsom?”

The underlying principle is profound. Hashem never demands the impossible. If another human being succeeded under similar circumstances, then spiritual greatness was possible.

Accordingly, Rav Soloveitchik explains that Avraham Avinu served as the living rebuttal to the claims of Sedom. The people of Sedom might have argued: “We lived in a corrupt society. Kindness was impossible. Morality could not survive in such an environment.” But nearby lived Avraham Avinu. His tent was open on all four sides. He embodied kindness, righteousness, hospitality, and moral courage. He demonstrated that holiness was possible even within a corrupt world. Thus: Avraham’s very existence judged Sedom.

This explains why the angel sent to destroy Sedom first visited Avraham. The visit itself was part of the judgment. Before destroying Sedom, Heaven “looked” at Avraham Avinu as proof that another way of living was possible.

A TORAH FOR EVERY GENERATION

Rav Soloveitchik derived from this Gemara⁶ a sweeping principle: *I believe with complete faith that the Torah can be*

lived in every circumstance. Every generation claims unique challenges. Every era imagines that authentic Torah life has become impossible. Yet the existence of righteous individuals disproves that assumption. Avraham Avinu became the eternal symbol that holiness can flourish even within darkness.

One of the greatest dangers in spiritual life is the belief that our environment defines us. Society pressures us to conform, to compromise, and to surrender our ideals. Avraham Avinu teaches the opposite. A single individual can illuminate an entire generation. One home filled with kindness can challenge an entire culture of cruelty. One person who lives with integrity becomes a testimony that goodness remains possible.

We can each be an Avraham avinu in this regard. Our conduct silently teaches others what is possible. Our faith gives strength to those who feel weak. Our commitment becomes proof that holiness can still survive in a confused world. Perhaps that is why Hashem told Avraham to remain seated while He stood. Because the life of a true servant of God becomes itself a form of judgment, inspiration, and eternal testimony. ■

6. Ibid

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