



Yeshivat Ma'alot

Parashat Va'yera

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ישיבת מעלות

פרשת וירא

רב יהושע ויצמן שליט"א

Each Person in Their Own Way

This week's Parasha opens with Hashem revealing Himself to Avraham Avineu- "Va'yera elav Hashem." Both the Midrash¹ and Agadat Bereshit² expound on the way that Hashem visited Avraham. Avraham praised Hashem for guarding him when he fought against the Kings and for holding his hand when he circumcised himself. Above that Hashem showed humility towards Avraham, for when He came to reveal Himself, Avraham sat and Hashem stood- "and he (Avraham) was sitting in the opening of his tent."³ What is the significance that Avraham sat as Hashem "stood" over him?

The Mishnah in Masechet Brachot⁴ relates a famous machloket, disagreement, between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel regarding Kriat Shema. Beit Shammai is of the opinion that in the evening one needs to recite the Shema lying down, similar to the way that one sleeps at night, and in the morning one should recite Shema sitting, similar to the alert state that one is in during the day. Beit Hillel, on the other hand, says that Shema can be recited in whatever state one prefers. The Mishnah continues to bring a story of Rabi Tarfon who was once traveling from one place to another. When it was time to say the evening Shema he laid down by the side of the road to fulfill his requirement according to Beit Shammai. By doing so he put himself in danger of being robbed or harmed. The Chachamim said to him that not only was he at fault for putting himself in danger, but he was at fault for disobeying the ruling of Beit Hillel.

According to Beit Hillel, one is allowed to say the Shema however he pleases. If so, why did the Chachamim accuse Rabi Tarfon of going against Beit Hillel's ruling- he was allowed to read however he chose?!

There is definitely a deeper understanding of this machloket. Beit Shammai rules that one cannot read Kriat Shema in his normal way of being, as he chooses. The regular, everyday, course of life opposes the essence of Shema- taking upon oneself the oneness and sovereignty of Hashem. One must make a differentiation, either by lying down or sitting, in order to fully live the Shema. Beit Hillel holds that there is

¹ Bereshit Rabbah 48, 1

² Chapter 19

³ Bereshit 18, 1

⁴ Brachot 10b

no need to do anything out of the ordinary or to make any sort of drastic changes in order to fully accept the yoke of Heaven. The everyday course of life is an essential part of the unity of Hashem and the recitation of the Shema in any situation reveals the true holiness of life. This is the ultimate depth of the Kriat Shema. According to Beit Shammai one must leave the regular world in order to say Shema or to be elevated. According to Beit Hillel one must say Shema from within regular course of life- also there one can reveal Hashem's sovereignty.

The opinion of Beit Hillel is parallel to Avraham sitting while Hashem revealed Himself. After the Brit Milah, Avraham was on such a level that he did not need to make any change in who he was or how he was in order to receive Hashem's presence. From within the course of life Hashem showed Himself to Avraham Avineu. At any moment and in any situation Avraham was ready for Hashem, for his entire life was lived on this lofty level.

This was the climax that Avraham reached, after climbing many levels of holiness. At first Hashem shielded Avraham from the Kings⁵, "Magen Avraham." Those that wished to detour him from his path were blocked. From there Hashem assisted him during the Brit Milah. From this point onward, not only was Hashem there to protect and assist, but rather all of life was lived while being at one with Hashem. Therefore, Avraham neither stood up nor exited his tent, rather he stayed sitting just as he was before, and merited this Godly revelation.

Hashem does not only reveal Himself at certain times or in certain situations, rather He is present everywhere and at all times. Man is all the time worthy of Godly revelation. A person can accept the Heavenly yoke and the oneness of Hashem wherever he is- and he should live his life on this level, all time being ready for it. The path that Avraham Avineu paved for us is seen in the words of Beit Hillel, and they call to us to reveal holiness and Godliness all we do and in every place we go. By doing so we shall be worthy for the revelation of the name of Hashem.

⁵ Bereshit 14