

Our Kindness Will Bring Moshiach

At the beginning of this week's Parsha, Vayeira, we read how Hashem visited Avraham after he had his bris. At that time, he saw three people, and said to Hashem, "My Master, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass Your servant by."¹ Avraham was asking Hashem not to leave while he went to take care of the three potential guests.

The Talmud² learns from Avraham's words that "it is greater to take in guests than to receive the face of the Divine Presence" – because as Avraham was receiving the Divine Presence, he stopped and asked Hashem to wait as he went to take care of the guests.

The Rambam³ brings this as the law. He says, "And this is the rule that our father Avraham established, and the way of kindness that he accustomed himself to: he fed those who passed by the way, he gave them to drink and he would see them off. And it is greater to take in guests than to receive the face of the Divine Presence, as it says, 'And he saw, and behold, there were three men.'"

The way of the Rambam in his book of law, the *Yad Hachazakah*, is to bring the law without citing the sources. So, whenever he cites a verse as a source, there is something that the verse adds to the understanding of the particular law. However, in our case, the verse, "And he saw, and behold, there were three men," doesn't seem to be adding anything to the understanding of the law of taking in guests. Why does the Rambam cite this verse?

Another question: The Rambam makes it clear in his Commentary on Mishnah⁴ that the Mitzvos that we do today are not because of what our forefathers did, but rather, because Hashem commanded us to do them when he gave us the Torah on Mount Sinai. However, here he says that it is "the rule that our father Avraham established."

The Rambam⁵ says himself that the Mitzvah of taking in guests is part of the Mitzvah of "You should love your fellow as yourself,"⁶ meaning that it is from Sinai, and not from Avraham. So why does he tell us that it is the rule that our father Avraham established?

Tikkunei Zohar⁷ cites Rabbi Shimon saying, "One who takes in guests with his whole heart, it is as if he is receiving the face of the Divine Presence."

This statement of Rabbi Shimon seems to be contradicting the Talmud's statement. The Talmud says that taking guests is "greater" than receiving the Divine Presence, whereas Rabbi Shimon says that it is "as if" he receives the Divine Presence.

Although it is common for the Tikkunei Zohar to differ in opinion from the Talmud, in our case, it doesn't make sense to say that they differ, because the Talmud learns it from a verse and a factual story that happened with Avraham. As such, we have to clarify the matter, since it is obvious that they can't be arguing. How can we reconcile these seemingly opposing statements?

We will begin to understand this by taking a look at Rabbi Shimon and who he was. This Rabbi Shimon was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar, the greatest sage of his day – he was one of the people who was just on a higher plain.⁸

On top of that, the Alter Rebbe⁹ says that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was able to accomplish with his spiritual service to Hashem what we accomplish with our physical Mitzvos. When he was forced into hiding from the Romans, who wanted to kill him, he hid in a cave for thirteen years. While he was there, he had nothing to do Mitzvos with: no Matzah for Pesach, no Shofar for Rosh Hashanah, no Sukka

⁵ Rambam, *Hilchos Avel*, 14:1.

⁶ Leviticus, 19:18.

⁷ Tikkunei Zohar, *tikkun* 6, near the end.

⁸ "*Bnei Aliya*," see Talmud, Sukka 45b.

⁹ *Lekutei Torah*, Shemini, *maamar* that begins "*Livyoson*."

¹ Bereishis 18:3, according to the second opinion in Rashi.

² Talmud, Shabbos, 127a.

³ Rambam, *Hilchos Avel*, 14:2.

⁴ Rambam, *Pairush Hamishnayos*, Chulin, 7:6.

or Lulav for Sukkos, etc., etc. However, he was so great that he was able to do them spiritually.¹⁰

For Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, receiving the Divine Presence was his normal state. So when he says that taking in guests is “as if he receives the Divine Presence,” he is talking about a higher level of Divine Presence; a level of Divine Presence that is not common to him, a level that he aspires to.

For us, who are not at Rabbi Shimon’s level, who are not used to receiving the Divine Presence, taking in guests is definitely higher than receiving the Divine Presence. However, for Rabbi Shimon, who received this level of Divine Presence regularly, when he said it is “as if,” he is referring to a higher level of Divine Presence.

So we can understand the Talmudic passage in this way. “It is *greater* to take in guests than to receive the face of the Divine Presence” because when you do, it is “as if” you receive a far higher level of Divine Presence.

Now we can understand why the Rambam brings the verse. It is known¹¹ that the Rambam was a Kabbalist; some of his rulings’ sources are found in the Zohar, Kabbalah, etc.¹² So it would make sense that he would want to make it clear that Rabbi Shimon and the Talmud agree on this point, and to make it clear that there are not two opinions. He brings the verse, to show that it is not subject to differing opinions.

¹⁰ About people who find themselves in a situation in which they are not able to do a Mitzvah, either because they are in captivity, in hiding from tyrannical governments or because they can’t physically do them due to paralysis, injury or disease, the Talmud (Baba Kama, 28b) tells us, “One who is in a situation that is against his will, Hashem doesn’t obligate.” However, in Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s case, it is certain that he was able to accomplish spiritual feats in any case and draw the holiness into the world even without being able to physically do the Mitzvos during that time. This gives hope to people like me, who are in one of the above mentioned situations, that perhaps more than not being obligated, we could actually accomplish something through our spiritual service, if not a lot.

¹¹ See *Sefer Hasichos* 5700, p. 41, footnote *27.

¹² See *Lekutei Sichos*, vol. 3, p. 768, footnote 18.

This will help us understand why the Rambam says that “this is the rule that our father Avraham established, and the way of kindness that he accustomed himself to,” as he is trying to explain that Rabbi Shimon and the Talmud aren’t contradicting each other. Allow me to expand on this idea to clarify:

It is true that the Mitzvos, including the Mitzvah of taking in guests, is incumbent upon us because we were given this Mitzvah at Sinai, but the way we do it and what it accomplishes is from Avraham. It is because of Avraham’s way of kindness and the way he took in guests that makes it greater than receiving the Divine Presence. Further, because “the actions of our forefathers are a sign for their children,”¹³ we see that it is Avraham who implanted in us this nature of kindness, which makes our Mitzvah of taking in guests so powerful.

Look how powerful our Mitzvah of taking in guests is and how strong our connection to Avraham our father is. It is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, and akin to the higher way Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai received the Divine Presence. This attests to the greatness of this Mitzvah, which is rooted in the kindness of Avraham our father and in the Mitzvah of loving your fellow as yourself, which, in itself, can bring Moshiach. So, do this Mitzvah with all your heart, the way the Rambam advises, and we can hasten the coming of Moshiach and merit to receive the higher level of Divine Presence that we will surely receive with his coming. May he come soon.¹⁴

¹³ *Ohr Hatorah*, Parshas Lech Lecha. Also see Ramban to Bereishis 12:6: “Everything that happened to the forefathers is a sign for their children.” And see Ramban to Bereishis, 12:10.

¹⁴ Based on *Lekutei Sichos*, vol. 3, pp. 765–769.