

5782 - Genesis 18-22 - Vayera (And He appeared)

<sup>18:1</sup>The LORD appeared to him (Abraham) near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

<sup>2</sup>Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה בְּאַלְנֵי מְמָרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פְּתַח־הָאֵהָל כְּחֵם הַיּוֹם: <sup>2</sup>וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו  
וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיִּרָץ לִקְרֹאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל  
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה:

1. 1. **The LORD appeared to him** This is the only example of this formula being used without some verbal declaration immediately following. Here, it seems to be a general statement **followed by a detailed description of theophany (a visible manifestation of God) or divine self-revelation**, mediated in this instance through angelic messengers. Unlike the previous theophanies, this one is not accompanied by an act of worship or the building of an altar; in actual fact, hospitality to strangers itself becomes an act of worship (see below). As the Talmud puts it, “Hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the Divine Presence” (Shab. 127a).<sup>1</sup>

2. <sup>2a</sup>Abraham looked up ...

a. Lit., “and he lifted up his eyes and saw ...”

1) Luke 6:20 (KJV)

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples ...

NAS—And turning His gaze on His disciples ...

NIV—Looking at his disciples ...

2) John 6:5 (KJV)

When Yeshua then lifted up his eyes ...

NAS—therefore lifting up His eyes ...

NIV—When Yeshua looked up and saw ...

3. <sup>2b</sup>and saw three men standing nearby.

a. וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים —And saw and behold! three men. *Rashi*<sup>2</sup> explains “One to announce the good news concerning Sarah (Michael [“who is like God”]), the second to overthrow Sodom (Gabriel [“God

is my strength”]) and the third to heal Abraham (Rafael [“God has healed”]).” But if “one messenger does not carry out two missions,” as *Rashi* tells us, then why did the angel Michael also go and save Lot? R’ Bachya<sup>3</sup> answers that it was because the same principle of love was involved in both missions and so one angel was authorized to carry out both. But he cannot do so when the missions involve two opposite principles, such as strict punishment and mercy. For the “peace which reigns in the celestial heights” (Job 25:2) is built on a hierarchical order governing the assignment of the functions of each factor of creation.<sup>4</sup>

PJE—And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, three angels in the resemblance of men were standing before him; (angels) who had been sent from the necessity of three things—because it is not possible for a ministering angel to be sent for more than one purpose at a time—one, then, had come to make known to him that Sarah should bear a man-child; one had come to deliver Lot; and one to overthrow Sodom and Amorah. And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the door of the tent, and bowed himself on the earth.

<sup>18:3</sup>He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree.

1. <sup>3</sup>If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord ...

a. The verbs in v. 3 are singular, i.e., only one of the three strangers is spoken to, whereas the verbs in vv. 4-5 are in the plural.

1) Genesis Rabbah XLVIII:9

9. He [Abraham] complained: ‘Before I was circumcised travelers used to visit me; now that I am circumcised, perhaps they will no longer visit me?’ Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: ‘Hitherto uncircumcised mortals visited thee; but now I and My retinue (attendants) will appear to thee. Thus it is written, AND HE LIFTED UP HIS EYES AND LOOKED (XVIII, 2)—he saw the *Shechinah*<sup>5</sup> and saw the angels.

3 Bachya ben Asher ibn Halawa (1255-1340) was a rabbi and scholar of Judaism. He was a commentator on the Hebrew Bible. He was one of two people now known as Rabbeinu Bachya, the other being philosopher Bachya ibn Paquda (c. 1050-1120) who was a Jewish philosopher and rabbi who lived at Zaragoza, Al-Andalus (now Spain).

4 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Bereishis*, (Mesorah Heritage Foundation), p. 231.

5 *Shechinah* (also spelled Shekhinah) in Hebrew means “Dwelling” or “Presence”—in Jewish theology it refers to the presence of God in the world.

1 Nahum M. Sarna, Gen. Ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis* (The Jewish Publication Society), p. 128.

2 Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), today generally known by the acronym *Rashi*, was a medieval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and commentary on the Hebrew Bible.

b. **וַיִּאמַר אֲדֹנָי** — *And he said, "My Lord."* Rashi sites the two opinions given in the Talmud (*Shevuos* 35b) concerning the real meaning of **אֲדֹנָי**, for this word can be taken either in a sacred or a profane sense. The fact that the Masoretes<sup>6</sup> punctuated this name with a *kamatz* (◌ָ) seems to prove, adds R' *Bachya ibn Pakuda*,<sup>2</sup> that **they understood it to refer to God**. For nouns formed with the *kamatz* indicate the absolute state whereas those with the *patach* (◌ַ) are in the construct. Consequently, the word **אֲדֹנָי** written with a *kamatz* designates God, but when formed with a *patach* it refers to men. R' *Bachya* concludes it is therefore of the utmost importance not to confuse these two vowels, not only in writing but also in pronunciation, where the difference must also be distinctly noticeable.<sup>7</sup>

c. **My lords** The word translated here as "My lords" (**אֲדֹנָי** [*Adonai*]), with a final long vowel (*kamatz*), is a plural form otherwise **used only for God**. Rashi and Ibn Ezra<sup>8</sup> understand it to mean "My lords." Maimonides<sup>9</sup> renders it as "My Lord" (referring to God). Because it is clear that the patriarch is unaware of the strangers' true identity, the unusual vocalization may be a signal to the reader that the three "men" are no ordinary wayfarers.<sup>10</sup>

2. <sup>3</sup>... *do not pass your servant by* – speaks of Abraham's hospitality

a. This theophany is not accompanied by an act of worship or the building of an altar—**hospitality to strangers itself is considered an act of worship**.

1) Shabbat 127a

Rab Judah said in Rab's name: **Hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the presence of the *Shechinah***.

2) Genesis 12:7-8

<sup>7</sup>The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who

had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup>From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent ... There **he built an altar to the LORD** and called on the name of the LORD.

b. Romans 12:12-13

<sup>12</sup>Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Share with God's people who are in need. **Practice hospitality** (welcome, warmth, kindness, generosity).

c. 1Timothy 3:1 (cf., Tit 1:7-8)

<sup>1</sup>Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup>Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, **hospitable**, able to teach ...

d. 1Peter 4:7

<sup>7</sup>The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. <sup>8</sup>Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>**Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling**. <sup>10</sup>Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

<sup>18:16</sup>When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. <sup>17</sup>**Then the LORD said**, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" <sup>18</sup>Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup>For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." <sup>20</sup>Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup>that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

<sup>22</sup>The men turned away and went toward Sodom, **but Abraham remained standing before the LORD**.

1. **וַיִּשְׁלְחֵם** — *To escort them*. "He thought they were ordinary travelers." In contrast to this explanation of Rashi's, the Zohar notes in the name of R' Elazar:<sup>11</sup> **He knew they were angels**, but he acted toward them as he did with all his guests. Accompanying guests is indeed an important part of the duty of hospitality. **When Abraham accompanied his guests, God, surrounded by the celestial tribunal, lingered with**

6 The Masoretes were a group of Jewish scribe-scholars who worked from around the end of the 5th through 10th centuries CE, based primarily in Tiberias and Jerusalem who developed/added the system of vowels to the Hebrew text of the Bible.

7 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Bereishis*, (Mesorah Heritage Foundation), p. 232.

8 Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (c. 1090-1165) was one of the most distinguished Jewish biblical commentators and philosophers of the Middle Ages.

9 Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1138-1204), commonly known as Maimonides and also referred to by the acronym Rambam was a medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages. He was also a preeminent astronomer and physician.

10 David L. Lieber, Sr. Ed., *Etz Hayim, Torah and Commentary*, (The Jewish Publication Society), p. 100.

11 Eleazar ben Azariah was a 1st-century Jewish tanna, i.e. Mishnaic sage. He was a junior contemporary of Gamaliel II, Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, Joshua b. Hananiah, and Akiva.

**this righteous person, revealed His plans to him and granted him His protection en route.** This mitzvah is such that the one who performs it retains the *Shechinah* with him on his way.<sup>12</sup>

2. 17. **וַיְהִי־זָרְקָה אֶת־הַשָּׁרִף מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל־סוּדוֹם וְעַל־גֹּמֹרָה וְעַל־כָּל־אֶרֶץ־הַשָּׁמַרְיָה וְעַל־כָּל־אֶרֶץ־הַיַּבֵּשׁ׃** —*And the LORD said, "Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do."* Rashi cites R' Yehudah's explanation: "It is not proper that I should do what I am about to do to Sodom without his knowledge. Can I destroy the children without telling the father, My beloved, to whom I have given all this land and the five cities concerned?" However, R Levi mentions a different reason. **Abraham was deeply perplexed about the generation of the Flood. He thought it impossible that there were not ten or twenty righteous people whose merit could have saved them.** Accordingly, God intended to inform him that the region of Sodom did not have ten righteous people. Job had the same preoccupation as Abraham with the problem of theodicy, but he made a hasty judgment when he declared, It is all the same; therefore I say He will cause the innocent and the wicked to perish (9:22). As for Abraham, he weighed his words more carefully: Will You also stamp out the righteous along with the wicked?

Moreover, God wants Abraham to know and to teach his descendants that great catastrophes are due to acts of providential justice, which is always vigilant and cannot be defied with impunity. **For fifty-two years Providence had vainly waited for the inhabitants of Sodom to return to their moral duty** (*Tanchuma*).

a. 2Peter 3:9

<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be his name, **is not a body, and that he is free from all the accidents of matter, and that he has not any form whatsoever** (Maimonides, Thirteen Principles of Faith, Principle #3).

a. Problems with "spatial" or "dimensional" orientation.

1) Genesis 19:24

<sup>24</sup>Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—**from the LORD** out of the heavens (וַיִּזְרַק אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַשָּׁרִף מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל־סוּדוֹם וְעַל־גֹּמֹרָה וְעַל־כָּל־אֶרֶץ־הַשָּׁמַרְיָה וְעַל־כָּל־אֶרֶץ־הַיַּבֵּשׁ׃ [*va-Adonai him-tir al-s'dom v'al-a-mor-rah gaf-rit va-esh mei-et Adonai min-ha-sha-mayim*]).

a) מֵ־מֵי־עֵת־יְהוָה —*mei-et YHVH*

1] מֵ־מֵי־עֵת־יְהוָה—a preposition "expressing origination," used "of a concrete object proceeding *from* him"<sup>13</sup> (i.e., *from* YHVH, the object being the burning sulfur).

< מִן —*min* (Pp)—"out of, from, on account of, off, since"

b) מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם (*min-ha-sha-mayim*)—"out of (*or* from) the heavens"

2) Colossians 1:15

<sup>15</sup>The Son is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation.

3) Hebrews 1:3

The Son is **the radiance of God's glory** and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

4) **NOT—three coeternal consubstantial persons or hypostases (an underlying reality or substance)—the Father, the Son ... and the Holy Spirit—"one God in three Divine (and distinct) persons."**

a) While Judaism believes that G-d manifests Himself to His creation (humanity) in many ways, (i.e. as a judge or a protector) **G-d's essence itself is indivisible and therefore without any possibility of distinction. Something that transcends both time and space cannot be described as consisting of three different aspects** (as in the doctrine of the Trinity). The moment we attribute any such distinctions to G-d's essence, we negate His absolute Oneness and unity.<sup>14</sup>

b) Tertullian, a Latin theologian who wrote in the early 3rd-century, is credited as being **the first** to use the Latin words "Trinity," "person" and "substance" to explain that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "*tres personae, una substantia*." But, the "first draft" of the doctrine of the Trinity was not ratified until the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE and not finalized until the First Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.

<sup>18:19</sup>For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

13 Francis Brown, Ed., *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Based on the lexicon of William Gesenius as translated by Edward Robinson (Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc.), p. 86.

14 <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/god-as-one-vs-the-trinity/>

1. כִּי יִדְעָתוֹ — For I have loved him (lit. *I know him*). “One who loves another brings him near in order to know him better. And why is God fond of him”? Because *he commands his children ... that they keep the way of HASHEM* (Rashi).

The knowledge of God and His Law was kept in Abraham's time by certain people such as Shem, the son of Noah, and his great-grandson Eber, who had the gift of prophecy (cf. Rashi on 10:25). They taught their knowledge and traditions in the *beis hamidrash* which bore their names. **But they did not have the persuasive power to convince their contemporaries and to cause the Divine light to shine upon humanity. Only Abraham attained the role of an apostle of truth whose influence on the minds of others was strong enough to leave a definite imprint on their lives.** Hence the Torah emphasizes the patriarch's accomplishments in his mission as teacher, starting with his own children and family, to be deserving of the love which God lavished upon him. This mission, which begins in the family home and thenceforth spreads **in ever-widening circles to men of all extractions**, appears here as being, *sub specie aeternitatis* (“under the aspect of eternity”), the foundation of Judaism.

This verse is the source of the duty of the father to educate his children in “the ways of God.” **This duty includes educating the daughters as well as the sons ...**

a. The ideal of the religion of the Rabbi was **the extension of God's Kingship over all the peoples of the world**, and the Jews had a constant reminder of it in the regulation, ‘A benediction which contains no reference to the Divine Kingship is no benediction’ (Ber. 40b). That means that the benediction had to be introduced by the formula, ‘Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, *King of the Universe*.’ It followed from this that **the doors could not be bolted against any Gentile who desired admittance from pure motives.**

**Genuine converts were welcomed and highly esteemed.** ‘Proselytes are dear (to God), for they are described in the same terms as the Israelites. The children of Israel are called “servants,” as it is said, “For unto Me the children of Israel are servants” (Lev. xxv. 55), and proselytes are called “servants,” as it is said, “To love the name of the Lord to be His servants” (Is. lvi. 6). Israelites are called “ministers,” as it is said, “Ye shall be named the priests of the Lord, men shall call you ministers for our God” (ibid. lxi. 6), and proselytes are called “ministers,” as it is said, “The strangers that join themselves to the Lord to minister unto Him” (ibid. lvi. 6). The children of Israel are called “friends,” as it is said, “The seed of Abraham, My friend” (ibid. xli. 8), and proselytes are called “friends,” as it is said, “(God is) the friend of the proselyte” (Deut. x. 18). The word “covenant” is

used in connection with Israel, as it is said, “My covenant shall be in flesh” (Genesis. xvii. 13),” and similarly with proselytes, as it is said, “Who hold fast by My covenant” (Is. lvi. 6). The word “acceptance” is used in connection with Israel, as it is said, “That they may be accepted before the Lord” (Exod. xxviii. 38), and with proselytes it is said, “Their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar” (Is. lvi. 7),’ (Mech. to xxii. 20; 95a). There is more to the same effect, which goes to demonstrate that **the Israelite and the convert were placed on exactly the same level.**

On the verse, ‘And the souls that they had gotten (the Hebrew is literally *made*) in Haran’ (Genesis. xii. 5), we are told, ‘**Abraham made proselytes among the men and Sarah among the women.** Whoever brings a heathen near (to God) and converts him is as though he had created him’ (Genesis. R. XXXIX. 14). **One Rabbi even declared: ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, did not exile Israel among the nations for any other reason than that proselytes should be added to them’ (Pes. 87b).**<sup>15</sup>

b. Acts 13:44-49

<sup>44</sup>On the next Sabbath almost the whole city (Antioch) gathered to hear the word of the Lord ... <sup>47</sup>(Paul and Barnabbas said) **“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”** <sup>48</sup>When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup>The word of the Lord spread through the whole region ...

<sup>18:20</sup>Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup>that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

1. זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וְעֹמְרָה כִּי־רָבָה — *Because the outcry of Sodom and Gomorra has become great* (רָבָה) ...

It is characteristic that the crimes blamed on Sodom are above all in the social and moral realms (*R' Bachya*). “This was the crime of Sodom,” proclaims the prophet Ezekiel: **“The pride of having an abundance of food and comfort and security was hers and her daughters, and she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and the needy. They were haughty, they committed abominations before Me, and I suppressed them when I saw it”** (16:49-50). Tradition tells us that the inhabitants of Sodom practiced xenophobia to such an extent that even people of that time, who themselves were little aware of humani-

tarian principles, were frightened of them. Their moral perversion is seen in their words to the two strangers [the phrase "so that we may know (can become intimate with) them," 19:5, is a euphemism with a very precise meaning] Moreover, all classes of the population of Sodom had become corrupt, young and old, everyone everywhere. It is probably this seemingly unfathomable extension of the crime, the participation of all the inhabitants in the outrage against morals, which condemned them to so terrifying a fate.

The Midrash relates the two words רַבָּהּ, one used here, the other concerning the deluge (6:5), and concludes that **the inhabitants of Sodom relapsed into crime and committed the same sins as those of the generation of the Flood.** The latter were punished by a flood of water, the former by a deluge of fire. The people at the time of the Flood used to follow the merchants' wagons filled with lupines<sup>16</sup> and each would take less than a *pruta's* worth, so that by the time the wagon left the city it was empty. But the people could not be prosecuted, for the *pruta* was the smallest coin in use and when less than a *pruta's* worth was stolen the victim had no redress (*Rabbah* 31). This jealous greed, devoid of all feelings of generosity, is branded with infamy in the Ethics of the Fathers: "What is mine is mine, what is yours is yours—this is the characteristic of Sodom" (5:13).

a. Micah 6:8

<sup>8</sup>He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

b. Leviticus 18:22 (CJB)

<sup>22</sup>"You are not to go to bed with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination.

c. Deuteronomy 14:3-8

<sup>3</sup>Do not eat any (abominable) thing. <sup>4</sup>These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, <sup>5</sup>the deer, the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope and the mountain sheep. <sup>6</sup>You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud. <sup>7</sup>However, of those that chew the cud or that have a divided hoof you may not eat the camel, the rabbit or the hyrax. Although they chew the cud, they do not have a divided hoof; they are ceremonially unclean for you. <sup>8</sup>The pig is also unclean; although it has a divided hoof, it does not chew the cud. You are not to eat their meat or touch their carcasses.

<sup>19:26</sup>But **Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.** <sup>27</sup>Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. <sup>28</sup>He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah ... and he saw dense smoke rising from the land ... <sup>29</sup>So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

1. Luke 17:22-37

<sup>22</sup>Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.

<sup>23</sup>People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' **Do not go running off after them.** <sup>24</sup>**For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.**

<sup>25</sup>But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. <sup>26</sup>Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. <sup>27</sup>People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup>It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. <sup>29</sup>But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. <sup>30</sup>It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. <sup>31</sup>On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. <sup>32</sup>**Remember Lot's wife!** <sup>33</sup>**Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.**

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<sup>16</sup> A genus of flowering plants in the legume family.