



# GROWTH

## At The SHABBAT TABLE

### PARSHAT VAYERA

#### The Late Visit

"And Hashem appeared to him [Avraham] at the plains of Mamre..." (Genesis 18:1). Rashi elaborates: *G-d was visiting the sick; R' Chama bar Chanina explained that it was the third day after Avraham's circumcision, so G-d came and inquired about the state of his health.*

Why was G-d compelled to wait three days until performing *bikkur cholim*? Why didn't He "visit" Avraham anytime before then, during the first or even second day after his circumcision?

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe, of blessed memory, offered a phenomenal insight. He explained that the fulfillment of the mitzvot now, ever since we received the Torah at Sinai, is in fact spiritually rooted in the mitzvot that our forefathers performed before *Matan Torah*. This is what *Chazal* mean in their famous adage: מעשה אבות סימן לבנים – the actions of ancestors remain as a symbolism for their offspring. In other words, our power to spiritually bloom and carry out G-d's commandments is due to the seeds planted by our forefathers, the pillars of our nation who started it all.

However, there is a stark contrast between the mitzvot performed by the *avot* before the Torah was given and the mitzvot that our people have been doing ever since that pivotal moment in history. Whereas the mitzvot of our forefathers existed purely in a spiritual dimension, i.e. it was more symbolic and not attached to anything tangible, the mitzvot after *Matan Torah* are embedded within the physical realm. Whether it's wrapping straps of *tefillin*, shaking a palm branch and citron on Sukkot, or properly slaughtering a cow for *shechita* – the mitzvot we perform are set up to reveal sparks of divinity and holiness within the material world.

Given this significant disparity, there needed to be a bridge – something to close the gap and connect the completely spiritual mitzvot of our forefathers with our mitzvot, which are centered around the physical world. Hence, G-d had given Avraham just one mitzvah that resembled post-*Matan Torah*: circumcision. Despite the fact that it was before the official giving of the Torah, this commandment was rooted in something physical and would ultimately allow the 'actions of our ancestors' to be a 'sign for their descendants.'

For this to be accomplished, though, there was one caveat. Aside from merely involving a tangible matter, the circumcision had to *fully* resemble any mitzvah after *Matan Torah*, which includes

being carried out through natural means and not via miraculous events. Since the commandments of the Torah would involve elevating physical entities within nature, Avraham's mitzvah would need to also be natural – all throughout the preparation, the actual action, and the result. Heavenly assistance via supernatural events would defeat the purpose of what this command was meant to ultimately accomplish. This also meant that removing any difficulties or problems that would result from the mitzvah would also be counterproductive. Every mitzvah and good deed naturally presents with some form of an obstacle or challenge – whether right before, during, or after – which is what makes their performance so significant. [1]

Understanding this, we can answer our query presented above. Our Sages teach (Nedarim 39b, Bava Metzia 30b) that visiting someone who is ill actually brings healing to the patient. The Talmud even says that by visiting the sick, one removes 1/60<sup>th</sup> of their illness. It goes without saying that if G-d Himself were to "come visit," i.e. rest His *Shechinah* upon a sick individual, it would bring full recovery to the illness and pain. Therefore, G-d avoided visiting Avraham for the first two days after his circumcision, since that would bring supernatural healing and wouldn't allow this mitzvah to resemble those after the giving of the Torah. Only on day 3, when healing after circumcision *naturally* begins to gain momentum and Avraham had already completed his part, did Hashem visit and fully heal him.

*This imparts several valuable lessons. Firstly, we see what a considerable impact bikkur cholim has, and how visiting the sick brings more than just encouragement; it has an actual healing effect. Furthermore, we gain insight into the mitzvot we perform in our lives. They aren't just traditions; they allow the physical realm to transcend its earthly bounds and infuse divinity into the world. And when they inevitably come with setbacks, embrace them; the obstacles that surround them merely attest to the fact that it's worth fighting for...*

[1] This is not to say that if it comes easy, one should search for problems; it merely indicates that difficulties are normally associated with carrying out G-d's will, and that was by purposeful design. Thus, challenges aren't meant to discourage, but actually empower an individual with the right perspective.

"Sometimes Hashem lets you hit rock bottom so that you can realize that Hashem is the rock at the bottom."

(Meaningful Minute)