

BEIT TEFILLAH



# Bereshiyt/In the Beginning

Commonly called **Genesis**

Torah Portion *Vayeira*

(And He Appeared)

*Bereshiyt/Genesis 18:1 – 22:24*

Haftorah: Melakim Bet/2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 4:1-37

Ketuvim Netzarim: Luke 17: 28-37

# Vayeira

## What does Vayeira mean?

Vayeira is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular of the verb “Ra’ah” which means, “to see”, in the passive voice meaning “and he appeared”. There is an explicit subject of Adonai. Note, the direct object “to him” is not defined, but we understand this to be Abraham, who had been circumcised three days earlier.

# Vayeira

## **Where did Adonai appear to Abraham?**

He appeared to him “in the trees of Mamre”  
At least one Christian Commentator suggests: “He appeared in the trees to demonstrate that just as an old tree still bears fruit, so would Abraham bear fruit in his old age.

# Vayeira

## **Who was Mamre?**

Bereshiyth 14:12-13 says, “And they took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son who dwelt in Sedom, and his goods, and left. And one who had escaped came and informed Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, the Amorite, Brother of Eshkol and Brother of Aner, and they had a covenant with Abram.

He was a friend of Abraham.



# Vayeira

**According to tradition, why was Abraham “sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day”**

Tradition says, he was sitting there recovering from his circumcision. The Rabbis say ‘Hashem came to pay him a visit’.

Why would Adonai pay him a visit?

The sages say: Bikkur Cholim

Talmud, Bava Metzia 86b says, “It was the third day from Abraham’s circumcision, and G-d came to inquire after Abraham’s Health.”

# Vayeira

## **What is Bikkur Cholim?**

In short, visiting the sick. Judaism teaches providing comfort and support to people who are ill, homebound or in distress is considered an act of Tzedekah (kindness/righteousness).

The Shulchan Arukh teaches the Mitzvah of visiting the sick extends to all ethnic and religious groups.

Leviticus Rabba 34 says, “The purpose for doing so is to alleviate suffering. The visitor relieves the ill person of one sixtieth of his suffering.

# Vayeira

## **Bikkur Cholim**

Another way to fulfill this Mitzvah is healing prayers.

The Jewish Tradition is to offer a prayer called, “Mi sheh Berakh”

In pre-modern Jewish communities there was something called, “Bikkur Cholim Society” They provided for all the needs of the sick.

In Western countries and in Eastern European communities, the tradition of medical self-help within the Jewish communities was a source for the development of private hospitals.

In some Jewish communities the Rabbi is expected to visit the sick, in others, they have committees established for it.

# Vayeira

**What did Abraham see while he was sitting at the door of his Ohel?**

The Scriptures (ISR) Bereshiyth 18:2-3 say, <sup>2</sup>“So he lifted his eyes and looked, and saw three men standing over (or opposite) him. And when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, <sup>3</sup>and said, “YHWH, if I have now found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass Your servant by.”

Other versions say (v.3), “My Lord, if I have now found favor. . .”



# Vayeira

## Who were the three men/visitors?

According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of Chabad, “The text calls them men; we later discover they were angels”

Most sources say they were Gabriel, Raphael and Michael.

**Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 86b** says they were:

- Michael, Gabriel, Raphael.
  - Michael came to bring tidings to Sarah
  - Raphael came to heal Abraham
  - Gabriel to overturn Sodom
- Michael accompanied Gabriel (with a follow-on mission) to rescue Lot

# Vayeira

## **The Purpose of the visit**

Targum Jonathan (Bereshiyt 18:1-2) ...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 son; one had come to deliver Lot; and one to overthrow Sedom and 'Amorah.

And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the door of the tabernacle (Aramaic: *mishkhana*) and bowed himself on the earth.

# Vayeira

## **The Purpose of the visit**

Rashi says: One to foretell to Sarah, and one to overturn Sedom, and one to heal Avraham, because one angel cannot accomplish two missions. You may be convinced of this because in the entire *parshah* they are mentioned in the plural form, [e.g.] "And *they* ate." "*They* said to him."

# Vayeira

## The Purpose of the visit

• Rashi continues: Whereas at the tidings [of Sarah's child] it states: "*He* said, '*I* will return to you.' " And at the overturning of Sedom it states: "For *I* can do nothing," "*I* will not overturn." Raphael, who healed Avraham, went from there to rescue Lot. This is what is said: "When they were brought out [of the city], *he* [the angel] said, 'Escape for your life,' " which teaches you that [only] one was involved in rescuing [Lot].

## Back to the initial encounter



# Vayeira

## The Encounter

**Bereshiyt 18:1-2 (ISR'98)** And יהוה appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, while he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 So he lifted his eyes and looked and saw three men standing opposite him. And when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, 3 and said, “יהוה, if I have now found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass Your servant by”.

# Vayeira

## The Encounter

**Pasuk 1:** God appears to Abraham

**Pasuk 2:** Abraham sees the three men/visitors/angels

**Pasuk 3:** Abraham addresses at least one of them

- Does Abraham address them as “Sir”, “My Lord” or “יהוה”?

**Arguably we have a few possible scenarios**

# Vayeira

## Scenario 1

Each are separate events.

1<sup>st</sup> Event: God appears to Abraham, as Rashi explains “to visit the sick”

2<sup>nd</sup> Event: The visitors arrive to deliver the news of Sarah’s upcoming pregnancy; to heal Abraham; and to punish the people of Sodom and save Lot.

# Vayeira

## **Scenario 2**

Maimonides opined the visit of the angels and dialogue with God was not an event at all. It is rather, a chapter heading, telling us that the events that follow are all part of a prophetic revelation; a divine-human encounter.



# Vayeira

## Scenario 3

God appears to Abraham, but before He can speak, Abraham sees the passers-by and asks God to wait while he serves them food. Then, in Pasuk 17, he returns to God and the conversation about saving the righteous begins.

# Vayeira

## The visitors

In the event of the three visitors being angels, we actually have 4 visitors, God, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.

**Chabad teaches:** The interpretation of the chapter affects – and hinges upon – the way we translate the word *Adonai* in Abraham’s appeal: “Please *Adonai*, if now I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by, I pray you, from your servant.”

*Adonai* can be a reference to one of the names of G-d. It can also be read as “my Lords” or “sirs.” In the first case, Abraham would be addressing G-d. In the second, he would be speaking to the passers-by.

# Vayeira

## **The visitors**

The Chabad Rabbi goes on to explain: “The same linguistic ambiguity appears in the next chapter, when two of Abrahams visitors – now described as angels – visit Lot in Sodom:

*And the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot sat by the city gates. When he saw them, he rose to meet them and bowing low, he said, “I pray you now, Adonai, turn aside to your servant’s house and tarry all night and bathe your feet and you shall rise up early and go on your way.”*

# Vayeira

## **The visitors**

The Chabad Rabbi finally concludes: “As there is no contextual element to suggest that Lot might be speaking to God, it seems clear, in this case, that Adonai refers to the visitors.

The Rabbi decides that since Lot wasn't speaking to God, then Abraham wasn't speaking to God either.

**What's the problem with this?**



# Vayeira

## The visitors

Interestingly, the hardline Jewish tradition, also from Chabad says this: “The simplest reading of both texts – the one concerning Abraham, the other, Lot – would be to read the word consistently as “Sirs”. Several English translations indeed take this approach. Jewish tradition, however, does not.”

**Normally, differences of interpretation of biblical narrative have no halakic implications. They are matters of legitimate disagreement. This case of Abraham’s addressee is unusual, however, because if we translate *Adonai* as “God,” it is a holy name, and both the writing of the word by a scribe, and the way we treat a parchment or document containing it, have special stringencies in Jewish law. If, by contrast, we translate it as “my Lords” or “sirs,” it has no special sanctity. Jewish law rules that in the scene with Lot, *adonai* is read as “sirs,” but in the case of Abraham it is read as “G-d.”**

# Vayeira

## Another Problem

Did Abraham have a visit from the Almighty, but get up and go bow down before the three men/visitors/angels?

Soncino Chumash says this of Pasuk 3: *My Lord* – Abraham speaks to the one who appeared to be the chief of the three.

The Artscroll Chumas says: *O Lord* – According to most interpretations, the word Adonai in this passage is sacred, referring to God. In taking leave from God, Abraham implored him not to go away from Your servant, but please wait while he attends to his guests.

# Vayeira

## Another Problem

Thus, in Chasidic interpretation, the text of the Pasukim should read,

“YHWH appeared to Abraham. . . He looked up and saw three men standing over against him. On seeing them, he hurried from his tent door to meet them, and bowed down. [turning to God] he said, “YHWH, if I have found favor in Your eyes, do not leave Your servant [please wait until I have given hospitality to these men].” [He then turned to the men and said:] “let me send for some water that you may wash your feet and rest under this tree. . .”

# Vayeira

## **Another Mitzvah**

This interpretation became the basis for a primary principle of Judaism: Greater is hospitality than receiving the Divine Presence.

Faced with a choice between listening to God and offering hospitality to what seemed like human beings, Abraham chose to offer hospitality.

Modern Jewish tradition holds, God granted his request and waited while Abraham brought the visitors food and drink, before engaging in the dialogue about the fate of Sodom.

Think on this idea for a minute: It seems disrespectful at best, and heretical at worst to put the needs of people before attending the presence of the Almighty.

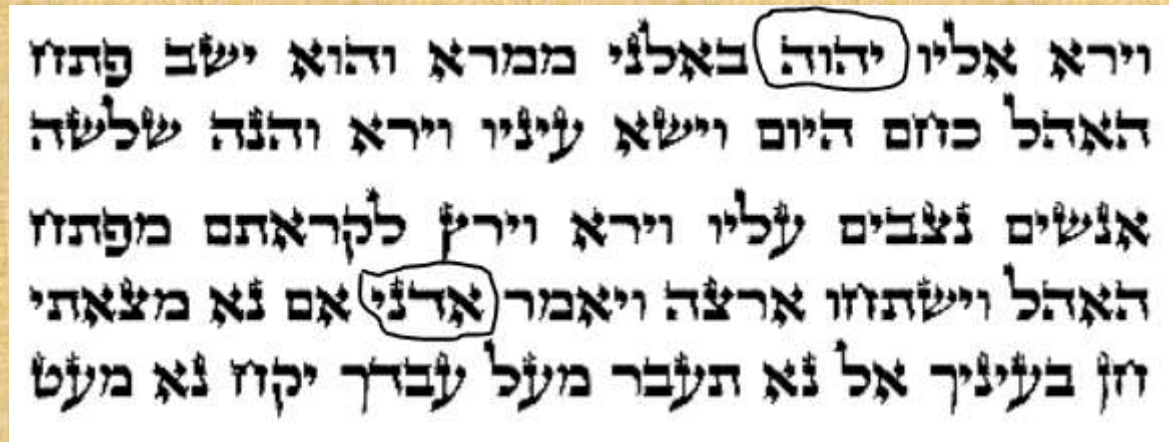


# Vayeira

There is a long-standing argument about the Masoretic text. It is believed by many the scribes changed the Set Apart Name from YHWH to Adonai.

Pasuk 1: Vayera elav Yaweh b'Eloney Mamre vehu yoshev petach-ha'ohel kechom hayom.

Pasuk 3: Vayomar Adonai im-na matsati chen b'eyneycha alta'avor me'al avdecha



וירא אליו (יהוה) באֵלָי מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח  
הָאֵהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם וַיֵּשֶׁא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֵשָׁה  
אֲנָשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיִּרְא וַיִּרְץ לִקְרֹאתָם מִפֶּתַח  
הָאֵהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ אֶרְצָה וַיֹּאמֶר (אֲדֹנָי) אִם נָא מִצֵּאתִי  
חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל נָא תֵעָבֵר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ יִקְוֶה נָא מֵעַתָּה

# Vayeira

Some interesting thoughts concerning the Scribal Changes:

The term “Tikkun Soferim” has been understood by different scholars in various ways. Some regard it as a correction of Biblical language authorized by the Soferim for homiletical purposes. Others take it to mean a mental change made by the original writers or redactors of Scripture; that is, the latter shrank from putting in writing a thought which some of the readers might expect them to express.

# Vayeira

The assumed emendations are of four general types:

Removal of unseemly expressions used in reference to God; for example, the substitution of “to bless” for “to curse” in certain passages.

**Safeguarding the Tetra Grammaton; for example, substitution of “Elohim” for “YHWH” in some passages**

Removal of application of the names of false gods to YHWH; for example the change of the name Ishbaal to Ishbosheth

Safeguarding the unity of worship at Jerusalem.

# Vayeira

There are a number of notes the Soferim made, to indicate changes, corrections and additions including Oral Torah. These notes occur in the side and bottom margins of the Masoretic text. In these notes, there is a list of 134 times where the Soferim changed the name YHWH and substituted with Adonai.

There are a number of lists out there of the changes listed by Dr. Christian D. Ginsburg. Ginsburg dedicated many years using all his energy to studying the Masoretic text.



# Vayeira

Ginsburg's list of modifications to the Set Apart Name show, Bereshiyth / Genesis 18:3 as the first entry.

List of Set Apart Name modifications in the Torah:

Bereshiyth [Genesis] 18:3, 27, 30, 31, 32; 19:18; 20:4

Shemoth [Exodus] 4:10, 13; 5:22; 15:17; 34:9(x2)

Bamidbar [Numbers] 14:17

# Vayeira

Bereshiyth [Genesis] 18:3, 27, 30, 31, 32; 19:18; 20:4

Shemoth [Exodus] 4:10, 13; 5:22; 15:17; 34:9(x2)

Bamidbar [Numbers] 14:17

Using the Soncino Chumash

Bereshiyth 18:3 – and said, “**My lord**, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant.”

הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם זָה מִצְאָתִי  
חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל זָה תֵּעָבֶר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ יִקַּח זָה מֵעַתָּה

# Vayeira

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Bamidbar [Numbers] 14:17

Using the Soncino Chumash

Bereshiyth 18:27 – And Abraham answered and said: ‘Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes’

Vaya’an Avraham vayomer hineh-na ho’alti ledaber el-Adonai v’anochi afar v’efer

וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא  
הוֹאֲלֹתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל אֲדֹנָי וְאֲנֹכִי עֹפָר וְאֵפֶר אוֹלֵי

# Vayeira

Bereshiyth [Genesis] 18:3, 27, 30, 31, 32; 19:18; 20:4

Shemoth [Exodus] 4:10, 13; 5:22; 15:17; 34:9(x2)

Bamidbar [Numbers] 14:17

Using the Soncino Chumash

Bereshiyth 18:30 – And he said, ‘Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Peradventure there shall thirty be found there.’ And He said ‘I will not do it if I find thirty there’.

Vayomer al-na yichar la’Adonai va’adaberah ulay yimatz’un sham shloshim  
vayomer loe’eseh im-emtza sham shloshim.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִחַר לְאָדֹנָי וְאִדְבַרְהָ אֲוֹלִי  
יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם אִמְצָא  
שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים



# Questions/Comments?

