



FAKE HOSPITALITY?

Abraham hosted G-d Himself in his tent. When he saw three passing Arabs, he asked G-d to wait while he welcomed and cared for them. Only later did he reveal that his guests were in fact angels in disguise. Did Abraham keep G-d waiting for a fake mitzvah?

An original analysis of this Biblical story

TEACHER'S MANUAL



JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



PARSHAT VAYERA



For sponsorship opportunities, email jewishinsights@shluchim.org



Published and Copyright 2022 by

Shluchim Office International

816 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213

718.221.0500

5783 - 2022

Founded in 2008 in memory of Rabbi Gabi and Rivky Holtzberg OB" M
Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

Contents

A. Hospitality is greater than welcoming the Divine presence.....5

Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent, in pain from his circumcision, when G-d came to visit him. When G-d saw that he was in even more pain because of the lack of guests, he sent him three guests (Source 1). From this the Talmud learns that “hospitality is greater than welcoming the Divine presence.”

Lesson: The importance of the mitzvah of hospitality.

B. Fake Hospitality.....9

Was the hospitality in vain? After all, the guests were angels, who only acted as if they were eating (Source 2). Did Abraham really fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality? And could he have erred, even if inadvertently, in leaving the Divine presence for pretended hospitality?

Lesson: It is not enough to have good intentions, the mitzvah must be actually—and properly—fulfilled.

C. Physical Mitzvot and Spiritual Mitzvot.....14

Our holy ancestors fulfilled the mitzvot in the spiritual sense, and we, “the children,” fulfill them in the physical dimension. It was the fulfillment of the mitzvot by our ancestors that paved the way for us to observe them after the giving of the Torah.

Insight: With holy people there is no “I made a mistake”, “I erred”. When one guards himself to the best of his ability to do everything right, G-d protects him from mistakes.

D. Abraham Gives Energy for Our Hospitality.....17

Abraham’s observance of the mitzvah of hospitality is what paved the way for us to fulfill this mitzvah after the giving of the Torah. Therefore the fact that the angels did not actually eat is irrelevant. Since Abraham entertained them wholeheartedly, he thereby paved the way for his descendants, the Jewish people, showing them how to properly fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality, and therefore, the fact that he left the Divine presence for hospitality, was justified.

Introduction

The mitzvah of hospitality is one of the mitzvot which the Jewish people are praised for. Throughout the generations, Jews of all backgrounds have been particular about observing this mitzvah, even under life-threatening conditions. From where do we learn about this mitzvah? From Abraham our forefather. But did he actually welcome guests? A study about intent, desire and real action.

השיעור לפרשת וירא

משיחת שבת פרשת וירא, י"ח מרחשוון תשכ"ה
תורת מנחם כרך מ"א, עמ' 249

A. Hospitality is Greater Than Greeting the Divine Presence

Our Parsha begins with the events of the third day after Abraham circumcised himself, according to G-d's command.

On the first day, Abraham was busy with the mitzvah of circumcision. The next day he concentrated on healing the other circumcised people in his house and on the pain from his own circumcision. On the third day Avraham grew concerned: Two and a half days have already passed, and no one has come to my house. Where are all the passersby who usually stop by? The heat of the day overwhelms the wayfarers, and they need cold water to refresh themselves, and some bread to satisfy their hunger. Why is no one coming?

Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to go out and look on the roads, and if there are any passersby there to bring them over. But Eliezer returned alone, empty handed. Abraham sat in his tent, and peering into the distance from the multiple openings of his tent he couldn't see a single living soul.

Then, in the middle of the third day, G-d reveals himself to Abraham. And during this special visit of G-d himself to Abraham, who is recovering from a circumcision, three guests suddenly appear.

Let's see the story as it's written in the Torah:

Source 1 Genesis, 18:1-5

Student's Now the L-rd appeared to him in the plains of
pg. 3 Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent when the day was hot.

Rashi

When the day was hot: G-d took the sun out of its sheath so as not to trouble Abraham with wayfarers. But since He saw that Abraham was troubled by the fact that no wayfarers were coming, He brought the angels to him in the guise of men.

And he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing beside him, and he saw and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and he prostrated himself to the ground.

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאַלְנֵי מְמָרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל כְּחַם הַיּוֹם.

רש"י

כְּחַם הַיּוֹם. הוֹצִיא הַקֶּבֶ"ה חֲמָה מִנִּרְתִיקָהּ, שְׁלֹא לְהַטְרִיחוֹ בְּאוֹרְחִים, וּלְפִי שְׂרָאָהוּ מְצֻטְעָר שְׁלֹא הָיוּ אוֹרְחִים בָּאִים, הֵבִיא הַמַּלְאָכִים עָלָיו בְּדַמוֹת אֲנָשִׁים.

וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא, וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו, וַיֵּרָא וַיָּרֹץ לְקִרְיָתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה.

Rashi

One angel to bring the news [of Isaac's birth] to Sarah, one angel to overturn Sodom, and one angel to heal Abraham. This was necessary because one angel cannot perform two errands.

And he said, "My master[s], if only I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass on from beside your servant.

Rashi

...Abraham told G-d to wait for him while he runs and brings in the wayfarers.

Student's Please take a little water and bathe your feet, and
pg. 4 recline under the tree.

And I will take a morsel of bread, and sustain your hearts; afterwards you shall pass on, because you have passed by your servant." And they said, "So shall you do, as you have spoken."

רש"י

וְהָנָה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים. אֶחָד לְבִשֹׁר אֶת שָׂרָה וְאֶחָד לְהַפֵּךְ אֶת סְדוֹם וְאֶחָד לְרַפְּאוֹת אֶת אַבְרָהָם, שְׂאִין מִלֶּאֱךָ אֶחָד עוֹשֶׂה שְׁתֵּי שְׁלִיחוֹת.

וַיֹּאמֶר: "אֲדֹנָי אִם נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ."

רש"י

...הָיָה אוֹמֵר לְהַקְבִּ"ה לְהִמָּתִין לוֹ עַד שְׂרֹוץ וַיִּכְנִס אֶת הָאוֹרְחִים.

יִקַּח נָא מֵעֵט מַיִם וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֲנוּ תַחַת הָעֵץ.

וְאֶקְחָה פֶתֶל לֶחֶם וְסַעַדוּ לְבַבְכֶם אַחֵר תַּעֲבֹרוּ כִּי עַל כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל עַבְדְּכֶם, וַיֹּאמְרוּ: "כֵּן תַּעֲשֶׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ."

Place: The Plains Of Mamre

The place of residence of Abraham our father, where the angels appeared to him, was the plains of Mamre. This location is identified today as the site "Ramat el Khalil" near Hebron.

Legend has it that a large and impressive oak tree was planted in this place, and the residents of the area associated it with the oak tree of Abraham, under which the angels were hosted.

Pesachyah of Regensburg, a Jewish traveler of the Middle Ages, describes an encounter with an old man sitting "in the plains of Mamre . . . as the old man was dying, he told his son to show Pesachyah the tree where the angels rested."

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 4

The beginning of the Torah portion relates—as Rashi explains it, based on the Midrash—that Abraham excelled in hospitality. He excelled to the extent that there was a concern that he would ignore his medical condition and exert himself beyond his capabilities to accommodate guests. To prevent this, G-d “removed the sun from its sheath” so that no guests would come. Then, because Abraham was upset that no guests were coming, G-d sent the angels to him, in the guise of people.

First, G-d caused the weather to be extremely hot so that no guests would bother Abraham, and came to visit Himself. When G-d saw that Abraham was upset due to the lack of guests, He sent angels in the guise of people to visit as guests.

Meaning, G-d altered nature so that angels should come to Abraham—who was used to seeing angels—in the guise of people. Rashi reflects this with his precise language, “because Abraham was upset, G-d sent the angels to him, in the guise of people.”

The coming of angels wouldn't be something novel in and of itself. Angels had to come regardless, as Rashi comments on the next verse that three angels were required, “one to inform Sarah of the good news, one to overturn Sodom, and one to heal Abraham.” The novel element here was that the angels appeared “in the guise of people,” so that Abraham would think they are humans and fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality by caring for them.

בתחילת הפרשה מסופר - על פי פירוש רש"י שמביא ממדרשי חז"ל - איך שאברהם אבינו היה מכניס אורחים גדול, והיה חשש שמבלי הבט על כך שהיה חולה, יטריח את עצמו בהכנסת אורחים יותר מכפי כוחותיו, ולכן "הוציא הקב"ה חמה מנרתקה, שלא להטריחו באורחים, ולפי שראהו מצטער שלא היו אורחים באים, הביא המלאכים עליו בדמות אנשים".¹

והיינו, שהקב"ה עשה שינוי הטבע, שהמלאכים יבואו לאברהם אבינו (שהיה רגיל במלאכים) "בדמות אנשים", וכדיוק לשון רש"י "ולפי כו' הביא המלאכים (בה"א הידיעה) עליו בדמות אנשים".²

ביאת המלאכים כשלעצמה אינה חידוש: בלאו הכי היו המלאכים צריכים לבוא, כפי שרש"י מפרש בפסוק השני, שהיה צורך בכל שלושת המלאכים: "אחד לבשר את שרה, ואחד להפוך את סדום, ואחד לרפאות את אברהם"; החידוש כאן היה בזה שהמלאכים באו "בדמות אנשים" - כדי שאברהם יהיה סבור שהם אנשים, ויקיים בהם מצות הכנסת אורחים.

Student's
pg. 5

The Rebbe points out that the fact that angels came to visit Abraham was not novel. The novel element was that G-d sent them in the guise of humans, so that Abraham would have the joy and pleasure of hosting guests.

Student's
pg. 5

The Talmud derives from this story the principle "hosting guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence," because we see that Abraham asked G-d to wait while he ran to welcome the guests.

ומזה למדים בגמרא³: "גדולה הכנסת
אורחים מהקבלת פני השכינה",
שהרי רואים שאברהם אבינו ביקש
מהקב"ה להמתין, ורץ לקבל את
האורחים

This story teaches us something incredible: hosting guests is more important than hosting G-d Himself! G-d had come to visit Abraham, and then Abraham suddenly saw three guests approaching. Abraham said to G-d: Please wait a few minutes, I need to welcome some guests....

Joke:

The Cohen family used to be hosted many times for dinner at the house of their Aunt Paula.

On one of the Shabbat days, Paula asked Jacob, her little nephew: "Hey, Jacob, do you like eating with us?"

"Yes, very much!" replied Jacob, to the delight of his aunt.

Then Jacob added: "You know why? Because every time after the meal, father tells us: 'Now let's go to the restaurant'..."

Caution, Beware Of The Dog!

In the modern world, people tend to live defensively, with locked doors, high fences, an alarm and a dog. After all, personal safety is very important.

But isn't the price it takes from us, from a social point of view, a bit excessive? Living disconnected from the environment intensifies feelings of loneliness, causes us to miss out on relationships with neighbors and colleagues, and makes us detached from the human environment in which we live.

The Torah teaches us that Abraham was not only accessible to every guest, but also adapted his place of residence to suit his life's work. Abraham created four openings to his tent, so that any passerby, from any direction, could enter easily and would not have to look for the opening, or ring the doorbell.

We need to continue the glorious legacy of our forefather Abraham: Hospitality.

B. Fake Hospitality

Source 2 Genesis 18:6-8

Student's And Abraham hastened to the tent to Sarah, and
pg. 6 he said, "Hasten three seah of meal [and] fine flour; knead and make cakes."

And to the cattle did Abraham run, and he took a calf, tender and good, and he gave it to the youth, and he hastened to prepare it.

And he took cream and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and he placed [them] before them, and he was standing over them under the tree, and they ate.

Rashi

And they ate: They appeared to be eating. From here we learn that a person should not deviate from custom.

Tosafot, Bava Metzia, 86b

In Seder Eliyahu Raba we learned not like the one who says that they appeared to be eating and drinking, but they were actually eating and drinking in Abraham's honor.

וַיַּמְהַר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵהָלָה אֶל שָׂרָה, וַיֹּאמֶר: "מְהֵרָי שְׁלֹשׁ סָאִים קִמַּח סֵלֶת לּוֹשֵׁי וַעֲשֵׂי עֲגוֹת." וְאֵל הַבָּקָר רִצָּ אַבְרָהָם, וַיִּקַּח בֶּן בָּקָר כֶּךָ וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל הַנְּעָר וַיַּמְהַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ. וַיִּקַּח חֶמְצָאָה וַחֲלֵב וּבֶן הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לַפְּנִיָּהֶם, וְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ.

רש"י

וַיֹּאכְלוּ. נִרְאוּ כְּמִי שֶׁאֲכָלוּ, מִכָּאֵן שֶׁלֹּא יִשְׁנֶה אָדָם מִן הַמְּנַהֵג.

תוספות, מסכת בבא מציעא דף פ"ו עמוד ב'

וּבְסֵדֶר אֵלֵיהּ רַבָּה קִתְּנֵי לֹא כָּאוֹתוֹ שֶׁאוֹמֵר נִרְאִין כְּאוֹכְלִין וְשׁוֹתִין אֲלָא אוֹכְלִין וְשׁוֹתִין מִמֶּשׁ מִפְּנֵי כְּבוֹדוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם.

>> The Rebbe

Did Abraham Fulfill The Mitzvah?

Student's Learning the story on the simple level, it turns out that Abraham didn't really fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality, because his "guests" weren't actually people but angels. Angels don't need food, and they didn't actually eat, it only looked as if they were eating.
pg. 7

Even according to the opinion that the angels actually ate, this was only to honor Abraham, or because of the rule "act like the locals." But angels don't actually need food, so feeding them wasn't real hospitality.

כפי שלומדים את הסיפור בפשטות, נמצא, שבאמת לא קיים בזה אברהם אבינו את מצוות הכנסת אורחים, שהרי באמת לא היו הם אנשים, אלא מלאכים - שאינם צריכים לאכילה, ואכן לא אכלו, ורק ש"נראה כמו שאכלו".⁴

ואפילו לפי הדעה⁵ ש"אוכלין ושותין ממש", הרי זה רק "מפני כבודו של אברהם"⁶, או מפני ש"אזלת לקרתא הלך בנימוסי" [הלכת אל עיר - התנהג בנימוסיה]⁷ אבל לא שהיו צריכים לאכילה ושתיה; ובמילא לא היה זה הכנסת אורחים.

Did Abraham leave G-d for nothing?

This raises a great question: How is it possible that G-d should conduct such a supernatural event for something that isn't real?

Based on the above it turns out that Abraham really wasn't allowed to leave G-d waiting, because he didn't actually fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality. How is it possible that Abraham should err with regard to "receiving the Divine Presence?"

על פי זה מתעוררת תמיהה עצומה: איך ייתכן שמלמעלה יעשו ענין של היפך הטבע בשביל דבר שאינו אמיתי?

על פי הנ"ל נמצא, שבאמת אסור היה לאברהם אבינו לעזוב את "הקבלת פני השכינה", שהרי (באמת) לא קיים את מצוות הכנסת אורחים, ואיך ייתכן שאברהם אבינו נכשל בעזיבת "הקבלת פני השכינה"?

והוא עומד הנ"ל.
(6) תוס' שם.
7. שמור"ר פמ"ז, ה.

(4) רש"י פרשתנו יח, ח (מב"מ פו, ב).
(5) תוד"ה נראין (ב"מ שם) מסדר אלי" רבה. וכ"ה גם בזה"א קמד, א (ראה ד"ה והוא עומד תרס"ג בתחלתו (סה"מ תרס"ג ח"א ע' ג ח"ב ע' כד)). -
ובוהר שם קב, א מובאות שתי הדיעות. הביאור ע"פ דא"ה, ראה ד"ה

Analyzing the story, it turns out that the guests weren't real guests, and Abraham didn't actually fulfill the mitzvah of hospitality. He didn't give food and drink to hungry and thirsty people, he hosted angelic imposters. True, he had the right intentions, but the bottom line is that he didn't fulfill any mitzvah. For what purpose then did he leave G-d waiting?

The Righteous Don't Make Mistakes

Student's
pg. 8

This was indeed a mistake, but the verse states that "No wrong shall be caused for the righteous." This is certainly true regarding people as holy as the Patriarchs, about whom the sages say "the patriarchs are G-d's chariot." How then could such a mistake occur to Abraham?

If we would be told that Abraham took charity funds and gave it to dishonest paupers we would immediately ask, how can such a thing be said about Abraham, even if it was just a mistake on his part. This is all the more true in our case, which is worse than dishonest paupers. At the end of the day dishonest paupers are still poor, but in our case there was no hospitality performed at all!

הן אמת שהיה זה בשוגג, אבל אפילו בשוגג - "לא יאונה לצדיק כל און"⁸, ובפרט מדריגת האבות, שעליהם נאמר⁹ ש"האבות הן הן המרכבה", ו"מרכבה" היא למעלה מ"צדיק" סתם - ואם כן איך יכול להיות (אפילו) ענין של שוגג אצל אברהם אבינו?

אילו היו אומרים על אברהם אבינו שלקח מעות של צדקה ונתנם לעניים שאינם מהוגנים, הרי מיד הייתה נשאלת הקושיה: איך שייך לומר דבר כזה על אברהם אבינו, אפילו בשוגג¹⁰. ומכל שכן בנדון דידן, שגרוע יותר מנתינת צדקה לעניים שאינם מהוגנים, שעל כל פנים עניים הם¹¹, אלא ש"אינן מהוגנים", ואילו כאן לא הייתה הכנסת אורחים לגמרי?

A person may argue, "What kind of question is this? After all, Abraham meant well. What is the "error" in the fact that he left the Divine presence for "fake guests", he had no idea?

The Rebbe explains that with great tzaddikim there is no such thing as an accidental transgression. As King Solomon says in Proverbs (12:22), "No wrong shall be caused for the righteous" - G-d protects the righteous so that no transgression will happen to them, even by mistake.

The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya that transgressions that are committed inadvertently, are from "the energy increase of the animal soul" - meaning, that when a person is immersed in the

בברכי" לשו"ע יו"ד סרנ"א סי"א).
(11) שלכן מדייק בש"ס (ב"ק טז, ב. ב"ב ט, ב) "בני אדם שאינן מהוגנים (שאו דוקא) לא יקבלו עליהן שכר" - דהיינו רמאי דכתובות (סז, סע"ב ושם).

(8) משלי יב, כא. ובתניא אגה"ס ס"ס כח: "השגגות שהן מהתגברות נפה"ב שמונחה".
(9) ב"ר פמ"ז, ו. פפ"ב, ו.
(10) וכמאמר רבי "אוי לי שנתתי כו" (ב"ב ה, א. ועי' ב' פי' הריטב"א -

(halachically permitted) pleasures of this world instead of focusing on acts of charity, kindness and studying Torah, it happens that he commits transgressions inadvertently. However, the righteous people whose entire world is Torah and kindness are protected by G-d from making these “mistakes.”

Therefore, when we, for example, give money to charity, we hope that it will go to a decent person and not to a person who will misuse the money for something inappropriate. But if, unfortunately, that is what happens, it isn't our fault, because we had no negative intent. On the other hand, when talking about the truly righteous, transgressions do not happen accidentally. Therefore, it is not possible for a perfectly righteous person to accidentally give charity to a person who is not decent and will misuse it. G-d protects them from such things.

In light of the above, how is it appropriate to say that G-d caused Abraham to “err” by abandoning the Divine presence in exchange for fake hospitality?

Student's How can it be that the Torah is set up
pg. 8 such that a true law “hosting guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence” should be derived from a false story, an act that was—factually speaking—contrary to the law?

איך יתכן שתורת אמת קבעה באופן
כזה שילמדו דין אמת - “גדולה
הכנסת אורחים כו” - מענין שאינו
אמיתי, מפעולה שהייתה (באמת)
היפך הדין?

Another question: the Talmud derives the law of “hosting guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence” from this story. How can this be derived from a story that turned out to be false?

Student's To resolve this, we must conclude that
pg. 9 even though the angels only “appeared as people,” nothing was lacking in Abraham's hospitality. Not only did he think he was fulfilling the mitzvah, he actually was.

ועל כן צריך לומר, שאף על פי שהיו
רק “בדמות אנשים”, לא היה חסר
דבר ב”הכנסת אורחים” של אברהם
אבינו. אין הכוונה שרק היה נדמה
לו שהוא מקיים את מצוות הכנסת
אורחים - זו הייתה האמת.

Is It Really The Thought That Counts?

From this question we learn something very fascinating and fundamental in Judaism. We are all familiar with the mitzvot, but many believe that “the main thing is the intention,” that is all that matters, and it isn't a big deal if in practice things do not turn out perfect.

But in reality, it doesn't work that way. The correct practical application of the mitzvot is of utmost importance. In Abraham's case, it is true that he thought they were real guests and he entertained them wholeheartedly. But that isn't enough! After all is said and done, they were not real guests and

hospitality was not accomplished here. And so a question arises, how is it possible that from this event we learn the mitzvah of hospitality? How did G-d make Abraham “err” by causing him to do something that is not real?

In the next part of the lesson we will learn the answer, but before that, it is important to understand the message of the question itself, which is: Intention and feelings themselves are not enough, the proper act is necessary.

C. Physical Mitzvot and Spiritual Mitzvot

The Patriarchs Observed Mitzvot Spiritually

Student's
pg. 10

To understand this, we need to preface the Chassidic explanation regarding the difference between the mitzvot our forefathers observed before the giving of the Torah, and the mitzvot we observe today, after the giving of the Torah.

The Patriarchs observed mitzvot in the spiritual sense. The Alter Rebbe proves this in Torah Or from the fact that there are a number of mitzvot that could not be performed in the physical sense during the era of the Patriarchs. For example: the mitzvah of tefillin. The passages included inside the tefillin discuss the Exodus from Egypt, and during the era of the Patriarchs the Exodus hadn't happened yet.

The Sages teach that the forefathers observed all the commandments of the Torah even before they were given at Mt. Sinai. They were so connected to G-d, and they had such a high spiritual intuition, that they were able to intuit on their own what the commandments were that G-d wanted the Jewish people to observe, and they fulfilled them even before they were actually commanded to do so.

The above teaching raises the question: how could they have laid tefillin, when the verses written in the tefillin are about the Exodus from Egypt which took place in a much later period of time! Additionally, there are examples of mitzvot that were not possible to observe before the Exodus. The answer to this question is that they fulfilled the mitzvah in their spiritual respect.

The 'Children' Observe The Mitzvot Physically

The fulfillment of mitzvot, by us, the "children," after the giving of the Torah is in the physical sense. Meaning, not only is the mitzvah itself much more defined, in a physical and defined reality, it also affects the physical reality. When a Jew makes tefillin from the hide of an animal and puts it on as part of the mitzvah, the hide itself becomes a holy object, which is why it is forbidden to throw tefillin

הביאור בזה יובן בהקדם המבואר
בחסידות, החילוק בין המצוות שקיימו
האבות קודם מתן תורה, למצוות שאנו
מקיימים לאחר מתן תורה:

קיום המצוות של האבות היה
ברוחניות. וכמובא בתורה אור¹² ראייה
לדבר, מכמה וכמה מצוות שבימי
האבות לא היו יכולים כלל לקיימן
בגשמיות. ולדוגמה: מצוות תפילין,
שבפרשיות התפילין כתוב על אודות
יציאת מצרים, ובימי האבות לא היה
עדיין את כל הענין של יציאת מצרים.

in the trash, because the physicality itself became holy. This wasn't the case with the forefathers. They kept the Torah only in its spiritual respect, but did not infuse holiness into the physical realm.

From where do we derive the power to infuse holiness into a physical object, something which even our forefathers could not do? The Chassidic teachings explain that this is due to two reasons:

1. At the giving of the Torah, G-d said, "The upper ones will go down, and the lower ones will go up." Until then, the different worlds were completely separate, the sacred in the spiritual upper world, and the physical here below. Whereas at the giving of the Torah, G-d, for the first time, abolished this boundary, and led by personal example - He himself came down on Mount Sinai, and gave the Torah. And it is with this power, that we can instill holiness in physicality.
2. But this is not the full story. The fact that after the giving of the Torah we can actually do this, is also not really in our power, but thanks to our forefathers... as we will read below.

The Acts Of The Fathers Are A Sign For The Children

Student's
pg. 10

This "act of the forefathers" was a sign—and an empowering force—for the service of the "children" after the giving of the Torah. The power of mitzvot after the giving of the Torah to refine and sanctify physical items is drawn from "the acts of the forefathers."

וה"מעשה אבות" היה סימן ונתינת כוח לעבודת ה"בנים" לאחר מתן תורה: זה עצמו שקיום המצוות, אחרי מתן תורה, פועל זיכוך וממשיך קדושה בדברים הגשמיים בפנימיות, הנה הכוח על זה הוא מ"מעשה אבות".

"Ma'aseh Avot Siman Labanim" (the acts of the fathers are a sign for the children) is an expression that originates from the Sages, and its meaning is that the founding fathers of the Jewish people directly influence us - their children. The life stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not only their personal story, but the story of all of us. And the passages of Genesis that record their life events are not merely a fascinating biography, they also serve as signposts for us, from which we can all find direction for our own personal life journeys. The choices they made, the qualities that characterized them, and the challenges they faced - all of these are powerfully present in our lives, and give us energy and inspiration.

In Chassidus this is explained in greater depth: the forefathers, with their actions, paved the way for the Jewish people in all generations (Abraham paved the way for self-sacrifice and faith, and the other forefathers in other areas).

Further explanation:

There are things that at first seem impractical and crazy, but then someone does it, and suddenly others imitate him and realize that they can too. The first “daredevil” is the one who essentially paves the way for all others to follow.

For example: when the Rebbe founded the idea of Shlichus, it was seen by many as something fanciful. To take a religious couple out of their Orthodox cocoon, make them give up their community and family support, and send them off to a completely foreign and non-religious place, without Jewish education, kosher food and sometimes without a synagogue, would sound like a totally unrealistic idea.

Other leaders thought that these young couples would, at some level or another, abandon religion, or, at best, return home after a few months. No one expected that they would remain an authentic Chasidic family and even become a dominant and influential force in their community. Even within the Chabad community, it was difficult to find many volunteers who would agree to such a thing.

But then the pioneers came, who obeyed the Rebbe and did it, and before long everyone saw that it actually worked. And everyone lined up...

We all know how the story ends, and really continues, today. So what happened? There were the first ones, who, under the Rebbe’s influence, paved the way for those who came after them. They showed everyone that it is indeed possible, that it works and is actually successful. (As the Rebbe said in a talk on Simchat Torah 5747-1986 that “the work of Shlichus these days is essentially a paved road”). This is essentially the idea of a pioneer.

The same is true in our case. G-d wanted the Jewish people to believe in one G-d, learn Torah, observe the mitzvot with material things, and instill holiness in the world. In a reality where there was a built-in chasm between the physical and the spiritual - this would sound absurd. But someone had to pave the way. And that’s what the forefathers did.

D. Abraham Empowers our Hospitality

>> The Rebbe

Empowerment For Physical Observance

Student's Based on the above, even though Abraham's
pg. 11 guests were actually angels, nothing was lacking from Abraham's fulfillment of the mitzvah of hospitality.

While Abraham's hospitality had to be performed physically in order to empower us in our observance of hospitality after the giving of the Torah, this is only necessary for Abraham's actions. The issue of what exactly happened with the food after Abraham did his part physically and spiritually, meaning whether or not the guests actually used it, is unimportant.

Although the guests were in fact angels, they appeared to Abraham in the guise of humans. This aroused his trait of kindness and hospitality, and he performed the physical actions of slaughtering animals etc. Therefore, there was nothing missing in Abraham's hospitality which was supposed to empower his descendants, because from his end it was performed in the physical sense.

על פי כל הנ"ל יובן, שאף על פי שהאורחים שבאו לאברהם היו באמת מלאכים, מכל מקום, לא נחסר דבר בהכנסת האורחים של אברהם אבינו:

הכנסת האורחים של אברהם אבינו הייתה אמנם צריכה להיות בגשמיות, כדי שתהיה נתינת כוח למצות הכנסת אורחים שלאחר מתן תורה¹³, אבל אף על פי כן, בענין זה היה נוגע רק שעבודת אברהם תהיה בגשמיות (כנ"ל), אבל מה נעשה עם המאכלים לאחר שאברהם עושה את החלק שלו הן בגשמיות והן ברוחניות, אם נעשה בהם שימוש על ידי האורחים או לא - אין זה עיקר הענין.

ולכן, אף שבאמת היו מלאכים, הרי כיון שלאברהם אבינו נראו "בדמות אנשים", ובמילא גילה הדבר אצלו את מידת החסד והכנסת אורחים האמיתית שלו, והוא גם עשה את הפעולות "ויקח בן בקר גו"¹⁴, בגשמיות - הנה בהכנסת אורחים שלו, שהייתה צריכה לפעול נתינת כוח לבנים, לא היה חסר מאומה, כיון שמצדו הייתה לזה אחיזה בגשמיות.

The hospitality of Abraham our forefather was the same as it was by all the mitzvot before the Torah was given. The mitzvah was conducted mainly in the spiritual dimension, and only a mere connection to the physical world was required. This is very different from our mitzvot, which are fulfilled entirely in the physical respect.

Nowadays, after the giving of the Torah, when we have good intentions to host guests but in practice it fails to actualize, or when we perform the mitzvah with fake guests etc, there simply is no mitzvah. Mitzvot after the giving of the Torah must affect the physical world, and the mitzvah of hosting guests, specifically, means to host a physical person.

However, before the giving of the Torah, the mitzvot were not supposed to affect the physical, but only to outline a path, to be a sign for the children. To give the Jewish people direction, strength and inspiration to do their commandments.

When we hear the stories about the hospitality of our father Abraham, it inspires us to follow in his footsteps and behave like him. For this, the hospitality of Abraham with the angels, is sufficient, even though they were not really hungry. Because Abraham's sincere motivation to host guests inspires the same motivation in us in the most genuine way. His actions mark the way for us.

Student's [Abraham's hospitality also had a universal
pg. 12 element - showing the entire world how to act with kindness. This too was complete, because the angels appeared as people and the world perceived them as such, and even saw them as if they were eating.]

גם העניין שאברהם אבינו על ידי הכנסת האורחים שלו הראה את הדרך לכל העולם כיצד צריך לנהוג בדרכי החסד - היה בשלימות, שהרי המלאכים היו בדמות אנשים, כך, שהעולם ראה אותם בתור אנשים, וגם ראו ש"ויאכלו".

Abraham put G-d on hold to empower his descendants

As a result, Abraham asking G-d to wait while he tends to his guests wasn't an inadvertent error, G-d forbid. It was a fully justified action because the hospitality on his end was complete, and he was therefore legally required to defer "receiving the Divine Presence," because "hosting guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence."

על פי זה נמצא, שהנהגת אברהם אבינו שביקש מהקב"ה להמתין לו, ובעצמו התעסק עם האורחים, הייתה (לא עבירה בשוגג חס ושלום, אלא) על פי דין, מכיון שהכנסת אורחים שלו הייתה בשלימות (כנ"ל), הוצרך על פי דין, לוותר בגללה על "הקבלת פני השכינה", כי "גדולה הכנסת אורחים יותר מהקבלת פני השכינה".

משיחת שבת פרשת וירא, י"ח מרחשוון תשכ"ח
תורת מנחם כרך מ"א, עמ' 249

Abraham didn't make a mistake when left G-d for a useless exercise of hospitality because he fulfilled the hospitality required of him to the fullest degree.

A Story

The first Chabad House was established by Rabbi Shlomo Cunin, the Rebbe's emissary to California, at U.C.L.A. in Los Angeles.

Rabbi Cunin handed the Rebbe the keys to the house, and briefly explained the plans for the activities of the place.

The Rebbe asked: "And what are the keys for?"

Rabbi Cunin replied: "They are for you, Rabbe."

The Rebbe said: "If I have the keys, that means I am the owner of the house."

"Of course!" confirmed Rabbi Cunin.

"And the door of the place, is it open or closed?" asked the Rebbe.

Before Rabbi Cunin could answer, the Rebbe said: "If it's my house, always leave it open. Don't close it!"

Rabbi Cunin took these very seriously. When he returned to California, he took off the door, and from now on was open twenty-four hours a day, without restriction. Students enjoyed unlimited coffee, pastries, and even Cholent...

(From: Prof. Green - Shalom U'vrachah)