חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

KOZHNITZ · VAYERA, AVODAT YISRAEL

Why did Avraham have guests washed through a messenger?

Avodat Yisrael

Drawing on Rashi's reading that Avraham had the water brought through a messenger, and on the Midrash's link between that detail and Moshe's striking of the rock, the author asks why the lovingkindness of Avraham fell short in personal service to guests. His answer is that a tzaddik must draw all people near to divine service, but must first purify them and not soil himself by mingling with them before they are cleansed of their idolatry. Because divine compassion calls for the tzaddik to serve the seekers personally, Avraham's use of an agent in washing their feet was a flaw for which he was punished. AI SUMMARY

"Let a little water be brought" (Bereshit 18:4). Rashi explains: through a messenger. And the Holy One, blessed be He, repaid his children through a messenger, as it says, "And Moshe raised the staff and struck the rock" (see there). This requires understanding. Why did Avraham Avinu, the man of lovingkindness, stumble by giving water through a messenger and not honor the guests himself? The mitzvah (commandment) is greater when done personally than through an agent. Afterward, too, he said, "And I will fetch a morsel of bread," meaning that he would trouble himself personally for them, though not at first.

One may say as follows. It is the way of the tzaddik (righteous one) to bring all the people of the world close to the avodah (divine service) of Hashem. This is all the more true of Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, who caused God's name, may He be blessed, to be proclaimed by the mouth of all creatures.

But at first it seemed to him that they were Arabs, and he did not want to descend from his holiness and mingle with them, lest he be soiled by them and by their thoughts. Therefore, regarding the washing, since they needed to be washed clean of their idols, he said, "Let a little water be brought" through a messenger, "and wash your feet," from your habitual ways. For it is a established principle that before a person enters into holiness, he must wash himself, purify himself, and cleanse himself of his filth and of the impurity of his deeds. Afterward comes "and rest yourselves under the tree," which is the Tree of Life, to bring them into holiness.

Therefore he afterward said, "And I will fetch a morsel (pat) of bread," for the word pat has the same gematria (numerical value) as talmud (480). That is, after they were purified and had entered into the secret of holiness, he troubled himself personally to bestow holiness upon them.

He then gave them the reason: "For that is why you have passed by your servant." He called himself by the term "servant," because the tzaddik is called, in the aspect of a servant, to all who come into the world. He must perform every kind of service for them, bestowing on them purity, holiness, wisdom, and understanding, and also all physical blessings, as far as is possible.

Nevertheless, he was punished in that the Holy One, blessed be He, repaid his children with the water only through a messenger. For given the greatness of the compassion of the Holy One, blessed be He, for His creatures, it was fitting that Avraham

extend himself to them even in the matter of the washing, and wash them himself, trusting in his Creator to guard him from all evil.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)

