חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

GER · VAYERA, SEFAT EMET

Giving up one's own standing can bring one closer to God

Sefat Emet

Drawing on the midrash that Mamre counseled Avraham to circumcise himself, the Sefat Emet explains that Mamre accepted a distance from others that he understood was required, and through that very self-effacement he merited closeness to God. He draws the lesson that a person accomplishes nothing except through bittul (self-nullification) before the community of Israel, and that one who diminishes his own honor while increasing the honor of Heaven will find that the honor of Heaven grows. AI SUMMARY

"At the terebinths of Mamre": because he gave him counsel about circumcision, and so on. Why was this written, and what praise is it for Mamre that he advised him to circumcise himself? What did it matter to him? Surely they understood that through circumcision a covenant is made, that he and his descendants be uniquely devoted to the Holy One, blessed be He, set apart from all the nations.

That is why Aner and Eshkol did not agree. But Mamre believed that this is how it must be, and that he himself was not worthy of being likened to him, so he agreed with him, even though he knew that through this he would be distanced. Yet through this very thing he merited to draw near, and God was revealed in his portion, and through the very distance he gained a connection.

This teaches every Jew that a person can accomplish nothing except through bittul (self-nullification) toward the whole community of Israel. He must resolve in his mind that if there will be more honor of Heaven among his fellows, he nullifies himself and all that he has, and through this he will always be able to find a place. This is the meaning of the saying: one who diminishes his own honor and increases the honor of Heaven, the honor of Heaven increases. And it is written "increases," and this is as above.

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