

# SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



## Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 20

### *Vayera, Sicha 2*

#### The Context:

On the third day after his circumcision, Avraham sat outside his tent, looking for travelers to tend to. G-d revealed Himself to Avraham, to visit the sick. (*Bereishis 18:1-2, Rashi*) Three angels in the guise of men then appeared, and Avraham approached: "And he said, "My lord, if only I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass on from beside your servant." (*Ibid, v. 3*)

#### The Rashi:

Rashi offers two interpretations of who Avraham was addressing:

*And he said, "My lord, if only I have, etc."* — He addressed the leader of the men, and he called them all lords, and to the leader he said, "Please do not pass by," because if he would remain, his companions would stay with him. According to this version, it (the title "Lord") is profane (and does not refer to G-d).

Another explanation: It ("Lord") is holy, and he was telling the Holy One, blessed be He, to wait for him until he would run and bring in the wayfarers... And the two interpretations [of Lord as being profane and holy in this context] are in Genesis Rabbah.

#### The Questions:

1. Rashi's first explanation is difficult to parse. He begins by saying, "He addressed the leader of the men," then he continues, "and he called them all lords." Which was it, did Avraham call only the leader "lord" or did he call all three men "lords"?
2. Why does Rashi offer two interpretations, what is the weakness and strength of each interpretation?

#### The Explanation

Immediately after the verse tells of Avraham's invitation, the Torah continues, "Please let a little water be taken, and bathe your feet, and recline under the tree." (*Ibid, v. 4*) It is obvious, then, that this is a continuation of Avraham's speech in the previous verse. First he asks the men to stop

by, and he continues to invite them to take water and relax. Therefore, the first interpretation is the simplest reading, that Avraham was addressing the travelers.

The problem with this reading is grammatical. The verse continues in the singular form: “if only I have found favor in your eyes [the Hebrew singular for “your” is used here].” If Avraham was addressing the three men, why did he use the singular? Rashi therefore justifies this usage by explaining, “he addressed the leader of the men,” Avraham was primarily speaking to one person, the leader of the group. But why would Avraham only address one person and ignore the others; it seems impolite? Rashi therefore continues, “and he called them all lords, and to the leader he said, “Please do not pass by...” So Avraham’s first welcome was directed to all three men, but his request to remain was addressed only to the leader, since he hoped that if the leader remained so would the others.

Despite this justification, this explanation is still imperfect, because why would Avraham only explicitly invite the leader to remain, leaving some doubt whether all three men were invited? He could have avoided any confusion by just inviting all three?

Rashi therefore offers a second interpretation, that Avraham was speaking to G-d. This would satisfy the singular usage without any complications. But this explanation is still weaker than the first for two reasons:

1. It interrupts the flow of the verses. After speaking to G-d, Avraham immediately speaks to the men “Please let a little water be taken...” without the Torah ever informing us that Avraham had noticed or spoken to the men.
2. According to the plain understanding of the narrative, it would be inappropriate for Avraham to interrupt G-d’s visit and ask Him to wait while he tended to the strangers.

Therefore, this interpretation is offered second.

This also explains an anomaly in how Rashi presents the two explanations. In the first, he details the commentary, and then concludes, “According to this version, it (the title “Lord”) is profane.” In his second explanation he begins, “Another explanation: It (“Lord”) is holy...” and then details the explanation.

According to the above we can explain this distinction as follows: The innovative thrust of the first explanation is that Avraham is addressing only the leader, not all three men. The fact that he is addressing people is obvious from the context of the verses. It is the singular form that requires Rashi’s explanation. Therefore, he only mentions that the title “Lord” is profane at the end of his comment, because it is not the main feature or point of the commentary. In the second explanation, however, the main innovation is that the title Lord refers to G-d, even though the context does not support that. Therefore Rashi opens with “It

is holy...” because that is the main point of the comment.

Finally, Rashi concludes by sourcing both comments in Bereishis Rabbah, even though in some versions of the Midrash, the second

interpretation does not appear. The reason he insists on referring to the version that does include both is because Rashi wants to stress that both interpretations are Aggadic in the sense that they do not entirely satisfy a plain reading of the narrative.

\*\*\*