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FOR
JEWISH
CONTINUITY

Vayera: Multi-Tasking

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“Now the Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent when the day was hot. 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.” (Genesis 18:1-2)

Avraham, just a few days post-circumcision, waits outside his tent eager to find guests to invite into his home. The *Ish Ha'Chessed*, this man who embodies kindness and selflessness, cannot focus on his own pain and discomfort, rather he seeks to transcend his personal circumstances in an effort to give to others. Alas, there are no guests to be found. It is hot and all have sought shelter from the blistering sun. God summons three angels and Avraham runs to greet them. But these angels are not simply sent to allow Avraham to fulfill the mitzvah of *hachnosas orchim* (hospitality); they each have a mission. One angel is sent to announce the birth of Yitzchak, another to heal Avraham and one to destroy the city of Sodom. Why couldn't God simply send one angel to accomplish all three tasks? Rashi explains, *“for one angel cannot perform multiple tasks.”*

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, 1902-1994) makes a subtle, yet profound observation. Herein lies the fundamental distinction between man and angel. An angel can only do one thing. An angel can only have one mission and when it finishes that mission, its existence is complete. An angel can't pivot or change. An angel can't decide to do something different than the intended purpose for which it was created. *“One angel cannot perform multiple tasks or agencies”* – why? Because angels are incapable of transformation. Their existence, while exalted and holy, is one-dimensional and limited. But we can change, we can pivot. We can embark down one path in life and upon realizing that it is incorrect can change course. We can make mistakes and then correct them. We can begin one task then choose to do and to be something else. Angels are holy but we are even holier.

There are times when we realize that something is broken or flawed within us. I know that there are things I must change, but I soothe myself with the excuse of *“this is who I am.”* From the words of the Rebbe we see that only angels can use that excuse, man cannot. Angels can say *“this is who I am”* for they are truly limited, one-dimensional beings who can only perform the particular task for which they were created. But we can be who we choose to be. We can change, transform, reinvent, and remake. Unlike angels we must face adversity and challenge and at times as a result of our life difficulties we become hardened and resistant to change. Let us remember, God had to send three angels to accomplish three distinct tasks, yet one *Avraham Avinu* was able to effect so much change all on his own.

The power of change is an awesome gift, may we find the courage and strength to use it wisely.