

## Parshat Vayeira 5776

Parshat Vayeira begins with the extraordinary hospitality Avraham Avinu displayed to three men, whom, to the best of his knowledge, were merely a trio of wandering Arabs. We don't know if the episode coincided with ShabbatUK, hence the open table. What we do know however, is the menu. The passuk says (18:8):

וַיִּקַּח הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחֵלֶב וְכֵן הַבֶּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לַפְּנִיָּהֶם וְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם מִסַּת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ

*“And he [Avraham] took butter and milk and the young calf that he had prepared, and he served [the food] before them, and he stood over them under the tree, and they ate.”* The classic, family-friendly question on this stares us in the face. Here we have one of the few recipes in the Torah, prepared by the first Jew in the Torah, and yet, it violates a basic principle of Kashrut by containing meat and milk together. Kosher restaurants have lost KLBD their licenses for less. And to make matters worse, the angels themselves actually eat what has been put in front of them. As with all classic questions, there are an abundance of answers. (I wish to focus on the role of the angels here, rather than on what Avraham Avinu was doing by seemingly inducing them into sinning.) Two general solutions emerge:

1. By listing the milky foods first, the passuk is overtly telling us that they were served before the meat. According to the letter of the law, waiting for meat after milk is not necessary, providing mouths and hands are rinsed etc (and we are told Avraham got them water to wash with). Thus the angels did nothing wrong.
2. Rashi's solution goes back a step, and questions whether the angels even ate. On the word וַיֹּאכְלוּ, he writes כמו שאכלו, that they merely gave the appearance of eating, but actually did not.

There is another answer which I wish to explore, or rather an underlining of the question. The Medrash in Tehillim (on the passuk of וַיִּנְקָהְם יְסֻדָּתָ עוֹ | מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים | וַיִּנְקָהְם יְסֻדָּתָ עוֹ) expands on the Gemara in Shabbas, where Moshe and the angels remonstrate as to who is more deserving of the Torah. The gist of the angels' concerns is that man is too bound up in physicality to make the Torah work. It is Hashem who delivers the knock-out blow to the angels' chances. Reminding them of the beginning of our Parsha, He points out that when they went down to earth, they blundered at the first opportunity by eating meat and milk together at Avraham's. So how can they complain about physical man being worthy – they made a mistake even a child

would not make (hence its relevance to that particular passuk in Tehilim.) Thus their claims at spiritual superiority fell at the first hurdle.

Where does the Medrash get this astonishing idea from? The Beis Halevi (R'Yosef Dov Soloveitchik 1820 - 1892) in Parshat Yitro brings the passukim in Parshat Ki Tisa (34;27) as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֵל מֹשֶׁה פְּתַב לְךָ אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּי עַל פִּי | הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה פָּרַתִּי אֶתְךָ בְּרִית וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל

And Hashem said to Moshe, *"Write these words for yourself, because via these words I have sealed a covenant with you and with Israel."*

To which the obvious question is, which words are 'these words'? Luckily, the passuk before has the answer. The immediate juxtaposition (end of 34; 26) is to the prohibition of meat and milk - לֹא תִבְשַׁל גְּדִי בְחֵלֶב אִמּוֹ . Thus the Torah is explicitly suggesting that it is through our separating of meat and milk that we were deemed worthy of receiving the Torah. This fits in nicely with the Medrash. Says the Beis Halevi further – and this is why we are accustomed to have milky food when we celebrate Matan Torah, on Shavuot. It is not the milky food per se which is important; rather it is our demonstration of how we keep the halachot of separating meat and milk (the serving of meat over Shavuot being a given since it is Yom Tov.) On a purely logical basis, this fits together nicely. The angels erred, and we benefited. Yet why is meat and milk so important a mitzvah, as to make it the hinge on which our being *zoche* to the Torah swings. Surely there are tougher challenges amongst the taryag mitzvot. In answer to this, Rav Immanuel Bernstein brings an idea from the Ralbag (R'Levi ben Gershon 1288-1344.) Let us ask a more fundamental question. Why does the Torah phrase this broad prohibition of *basar v'chalav* specifically in terms of cooking a kid in its mother's milk? Why doesn't the Torah just state outright the prohibition of meat and milk? The Ralbag answers that it is the perverse nature of this mixture that is important. Mother's milk is exactly what the young goat needs to make it grow – and now we are using it to cook him in. The source of life becomes, ahem, the sauce of death.

And this is the essence of the angels' argument. How can you give the Torah to man – it is too difficult and will end up killing him! The response from Hashem is that we should not view the Torah as a danger like the milk that is cooked with the goat; rather we can use the Torah as mother's milk should be – as our fountain of life and strength.