

Rabbi Ziegler - Parshat Va'yeira- 2021, 5782

Our parsha opens with three men, who were actually malachim [angels] in the “guise” of men, appear to Avraham Avinu which the Midrash [Bereishit Rabba Ch.20] identifies as Micha'el, Gavri'el and Refa'el. HaShem sent three different angels because, by definition, a malach is a function that HaShem wishes to have performed. Therefore, each function is a new angel, and since there were three missions to be accomplished in connection with Avraham and Sarah at that time, there were three angels to carry them out. As the Midrash states, “One angel does not perform two missions”.

In this case, Micha'el was assigned to inform Avraham and Sarah that they would have a son [18:4]; Gavri'el was sent to overturn Sodom [19:25], and Refa'el to heal Avraham **and** to save Lot from destruction of Sodom. Rashi states that healing Avraham and saving Lot, constituted a single mission because they both were for the sake of –rescue.

Rav Soloveitchik added a different level of interpretation on this issue. He said they were not two separate missions with a common purpose of “rescue”, but they were indeed one mission for the express purpose of healing Avraham. Healing is not merely a remedy for the physical body, Refu'at Ha'Guf, but healing must also incorporate the mental, emotional and spiritual aspect, Refu'at HaNefesh, of the patient. A patient with serious mental concerns and anxieties about parnassa [paying his bills] or about other illnesses and problems in his family, will find it difficult to have a complete Refu'at HaGuf. In our parsha, Avraham had not only the physical ailment from his Brit Milah but he also suffered the anxieties of concern for the safety of his nephew Lot. In order then for Refa'el to succeed in his mission of Refu'at HaGuf of Avraham, he had to also secure the safety of Lot, and thus complete his mission by insuring a Refu'at HaNefesh for Avraham as well.

The lesson for us becomes obvious. When we have the opportunity to perform the Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim we should not focus exclusively on the Refu'at HaGuf [that's the job of the doctors] of the patient but we should also concern ourselves with the concerns of the patient who may need help in making telephone calls, mailing letters, or other areas outside the physical aspects. Nice things to keep in mind.

Shabbat Shalom from Yerushalayim,

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