Parsha Thought

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לזכר נשמת מלכה בת יהושע - משה צבי בן גדליה

לזכר נשמת דוד בן אברהם

VAYEIRA

Our parsha begins, וירא אליו ה' באלני ממרא—Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamrei. The Nua Doraish asks why Mamrei merited that Hashem appear at his home. Quoting Rashi, he explains that Mamrei earned this honor because he advised Avraham to fulfill the mitzvah of Bris Mila. The Midrash relates that when Hashem commanded Avraham to perform the Bris Mila, Avraham sought advice from three friends. Aneir warned, "You're a hundred years old. How could you do that? It's too dangerous." Eshkol likewise told him not to proceed. Mamrei alone urged him to obey Hashem: "Hashem saved you from Nimrod's furnace, the war with the kings, and the famine—and now you are not going to listen?"

Hashem said, "You advised Avraham to listen to Me, so I will come to your home." Because of that single piece of advice, Mamrei merited Hashem's presence in his home and all the blessings that accompanied it. The Nua Doraish illustrates the spiritual influence of what we bring into our homes with a story about a yeshiva principal he knew. When the yeshiva needed new flooring, the principal hired a contractor who did excellent work and later hired the same crew to redo the floors in his home. In gratitude for the additional work, one of the workers, a Chinese man, gave him two porcelain dolls. The principal's wife liked them and placed them in the living-room display case.

A short time later, the wife suddenly began experiencing shortness of breath, despite having no previous medical problems. A doctor suggested that she might be reacting to fruit from a tree in their backyard and advised them to cut it down. Because one is not permitted to cut down a fruit tree, however, the couple hesitated. The wife consulted Rebbetzin Kanievsky, who told her, "It's not the tree. There is some kind of impurity in the house, and we have a tradition that impurity in a home can affect a person's breathing."

She returned home and told her husband what Rebbetzin Kanievsky had said. Although they knew of nothing improper in their home, they searched everywhere and found nothing. When the wife reported this, the rebbetzin told her, "Search again." During the second search, the wife remembered the two dolls from the Chinese worker and wondered whether they might have been made for idol worship. She ground them up and destroyed them. Her symptoms disappeared, her breathing returned to normal, and the fruit tree remained standing in their backyard. The episode showed how seriously impurity in a home can affect its residents.

If impurity can have such a harmful effect on a home and those who live within it, then the positive influence of holiness must be far greater, because Hashem rewards goodness many times more than He punishes wrongdoing. Every mitzvah performed in the home, every word of Torah learned there, and every act of chesed shown within its walls adds another measure of kedushah. By being careful about what we bring into our homes and by filling them with Torah, tefillah, kindness, and respect for one another, we create an environment in which our families can grow spiritually. May our efforts transform our homes into places worthy of Hashem's presence, so that His protection and bracha will always rest upon us and upon our families.