

## **VAYERA: DUST WORSHIP? Kli Yakar, translated and summarized by Rabbi Nisson Shulman**

- The Kli Yakar questions how Avraham could bar dust from his home, though it was worshipped. Would he bar the sun's rays? That too was worshipped! He explains that it was a way to bring the travelers closer and erase idolatry from their hearts through symbolic lessons.

VAYERA: DUST WORSHIP? (Kli Yakar, with an additional idea)

18:4 Yukach na meat mayim

Let some water be brought”

Rashi states that Abraham was careful not to permit an object of idolatry into his house, so he required that his visitors wash off the dust of the road from their feet, since he thought these Nomads were dust-worshippers.

This is very strange. Would Abraham eliminate dust from his house just because of the idiotic notions of fools? There are many sun-worshippers. Would he therefore banish the sun's rays from his house? It is more logical to say that Abraham sought to bring these strangers closer to Hashem by removing idolatry from their hearts. He therefore stressed “a little water”, for water is the symbol of purity. He also added that others should bring it rather than Abraham himself. By this he meant that the strangers must purify their own hearts. They couldn't rely on Abraham (or anyone else) to do it for them.

A kabbalistic interpretation is as follows: Abraham should have said *hishaanu baetz*, “lean on the tree”; why did he say *hishaanu tahas haetz*, “lean under the tree”? Abraham was actually telling them to enter into the shade of Hashem's Providence. Rashi has a similar explanation of the phrase “Their protection has departed from them” (Bamidbar 14:9), to mean, “The shade of God's protection has departed from them”. So, too, the Kabbalists explain the passage “Are there trees in it or not” (Bamidbar 13:20) to have the same meaning as “Is Hashem among us or not?” (Shemos 17:7). Thus, Abraham told them to lean under the shaded protection of the tree, alluding to the true guardianship of Hashem, in whose protective shade every living thing survives and abides.

Some say that Abraham's was suspicious that these Nomads mistakenly believed that since we come from dust and will eventually returned to dust, there is some divine power in dust.

I would like to suggest an additional thought; that they were nomads who make their living by trade and travel, so that the dust of the road was the symbol of their livelihood. Avraham was therefore teaching them that everything comes from Hashem, who enables them to earn their livelihood. It is not the dust, or their wisdom or their efforts, but the blessing of Hashem which enables all their striving to succeed.