

# PARSHAS KI SAVO - BLAME IT ON THE ANGELS

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## Blame It On The Angels<sup>1</sup>

*Gaze down from Your holy abode, from the heavens, and bless Your people Israel and the ground that You gave us...*

How do we see something? It all depends how you look at it.

You can look critically, admiringly, lovingly or contemptuously. The Torah uses different verbs to connote the different ways we look at things. We are therefore surprised that the Torah pleads with Hashem: "Hashkifah" / gaze down from the heavens. Hashkifah always means to look disapprovingly! The angels sent to overthrow Sodom "gaze down{2}" at the city; Hashem "gazed down{3}" upon the Egyptians just before bringing the Sea crashing down upon their heads. Twice is every shemittah cycle a person declares before G-d in the beis hamikdash that he has done his duty in regard to all the ma'asros and directed them to their proper recipients. Immediately thereafter, he asks Hashem for a brachah. He begins by requesting that He "gaze down" from His abode - employing the verb that means looking disapprovingly! Why would a person ask Hashem to look at us disapprovingly?

Chazal had a fix for this. The Torah, they tell us, wishes to convey that the merit of the proper distribution of ma'aser produce is so great, that it can change Hashem's glance from a negative one to a positive one{4}. But we still do not understand. Why employ a double negative to get to a positive? Instead of calling for Hashem's disapproving gaze, and then neutralizing it in the merit of the mitzvah of ma'aser, why not avoid the unsavory reference, and simply ask Him to smile upon His children in the first place?

And just where do we fix Hashem's residence, kevayachol, in our pasuk? Is "holy abode" the same as "the heavens?" This might seem defensible, but really is not, on the level of plain pshat. If the pasuk were trying to convey to us that they are one and the same, there would be no need to repeat the word "from," as if they were two distinct places. Indeed, the gemara{5} speaks of seven different heavens. "Abode" - in contradistinction to shomayim, the place of the celestial spheres - is seen by the gemara as the place of the ministering angels. Yet it offers no proof for this assertion, unlike the other levels of heaven mentioned there!

Here is what our pasuk actually means. The questions speak to each other; taken together,

everything falls into place. "Heaven" and "Abode" do refer to distinct realms. We ask that Hashem should behold us from His heavens, and shower us with berachah - but not until He first look disapprovingly at the Abode. The reason for disapproval is straightforward, even if difficult for us to fully comprehend. We would expect that the contrast between fallible and often failed human beings and their spiritual competitors should be huge and absolute. The ministering angels ought to make us look bad. The point is that they don't. Chazal somehow are critical of them. The celestial citizens don't always get it right. For example, the angels who told Lot "we are about to destroy the place[6]" performed imperfectly, either by prematurely revealing what should have been kept hidden, or by implying that they possessed some independent power, rather than Hashem[7].

Rather than make us look bad, they do the opposite. We daven to G-d: Please gaze down - disapprovingly - by way of Your own ministering angels. Do You find perfection in them? Or is that reserved only for Yourself, without exception? You will certainly not be entirely pleased with what You detect in the world of the angelic. If the angels cannot deliver on perfection, is it so surprising that mortal humans fall short of that goal? Don't humans deserve to be judged with a yardstick of compassion?

The pasuk thus means: Gaze down disapprovingly at Your angels in the Abode, and then look approvingly at us humans from the other heavens! The second phrase really ought to have employed a different verb in place of "gaze" - one that is more upbeat and accepting. Here is where the ma'amar Chazal we mentioned earlier comes in. While such a verb (like from the other heavens) would fit more naturally, the Torah utilized hashkifah for both phrases, to teach that in the merit of properly assigned ma'aseros, Hashem changes His stance from judgment to compassion!

We can employ the same approach to shed light on an enigmatic passage in Tehilim:

You will arise and show Tziyon mercy, for there will come the time to favor her, for the appointed time will have come. For Your servants have cherished her stones, and favored her dust. Then the nations will fear the Name of Hashem, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. He will have turned to the prayer of the aroused[8] one, and not have despised their prayer. Let this be recorded for the final generation, so that the newborn people will praise G-d. For he gazed from His exalted Sanctuary. Hashem looked down from heaven to earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, liberate those doomed to die, to declare in Tziyon the Name of Hashem, and His praise in Yerushalayim, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms to serve Hashem[9].

The psukim move back and forth between singular and plural. They can be understood as describing a future time, when people will daven on Rosh Hashanah for the full flowering of G-d's Kingship. They are not all equal to the task.

"He will have turned to the prayer of the devastated one" - some, out of true love of Hashem, will pray only to see His honor flourish. Because there are few of them, the Psalmist, looking prophetically to the future, uses the singular.

"And not have despised their prayer" - He switches to the plural, to include the many who daven to lift themselves out of the oppression of galus, and even to those who do not consider at all what they are saying, and merely mouth the words. Because both of these groups gather together with the enlightened individual, their prayers are also not rejected.

"So that the newborn people will praise G-d" - each Rosh Hashanah, all people become as if newly created. They will, on the holiday of Sukkos, gladly sing Hashem's praises, confident that their tefilos during the Yomim Nora'im will have been answered, in whole or in part.

"For he gazed from His exalted Sanctuary" disapprovingly, to contemplate the imperfections of the angels.

"Hashem looked down from heaven to earth" After gazing that way at the angels, He is able to look with compassion upon the rest of creation, including fallible Man.

"To hear the groaning of the prisoner" Hashem listens to the isolated individual who thinks of nothing but the pain of the Shechinah groans constantly in galus. No matter how comfortable or secure is his own situation, he will always see himself as a prisoner in galus.

"Liberate those doomed to die" G-d compassionately finds room to accept the prayers of those who daven entirely out of concern for their own fate, not for the pain of the Shechinah.

"To declare in Tziyon the Name of Hashem, and His praise in Yerushalayim, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms to serve Hashem" When different groups come together to daven, even when they pray for vastly different concerns, Hashem listens to all of them!

The ideas in this passage are all first evoked in our pasuk in Devarim!

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1. Based on *Ha'amek Davar* and *Harchev Davar*, *Devarim* 26:15
  2. Bereishis 18:16
  3. Shemos 14:24
  4. Cited in slightly different form by Rashi, Bereishis 18:16
  5. Chagigah 12B
  6. Bereishis 19:13
  7. Bereishis Rabbah 68:12
  8. See Metzudas Tziyon
  9. Tehilim 102:14-23

