

YAAKOV SENT MALACHIM -- LITERALLY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayishlach

Yaakov Sent Malachim -- Literally

The parsha begins with the pasuk [verse] "And Yaakov sent 'Malachim' ahead of him to Eisav his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom." [Bereshis 32:4]. The simple interpretation of the word 'Malachim' in this pasuk is messengers. In a well known comment, however, Rashi states that 'Malachim' is to be taken literally to mean 'Angels'. Because of his righteousness, Yaakov was frequented by Angels, so rather than send just any old messengers, he sent the 'Angels' who were in his camp.

In his sefer Darash Moshe, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, asks a very interesting question: Why would Yaakov have used Angels for this mission when he could have accomplished the same thing with human beings? All things being equal, a person should shy away from using miracles - just as the Almighty, as it were, shies away from making miracles. Miracles are only brought forth under the most special of circumstances when miraculous events are necessary. There is a concept that when G-d performs a miracle for a person, "his merits are diminished". In other words, the fact that the Almighty had to change nature on his account, so to speak, will cost the person.

Therefore, it appears strange that Yaakov felt the need to employ literal 'Malachim' on this mission to deliver a message to his brother Eisav.

To answer this question, Rav Moshe explains that certain people have reached the epitome of completeness (tachlis ha'shleimus). Such people are constantly aware of the 'miracle' of nature. There are many things that happen constantly and we take them for granted so we do not view them as miraculous. But a spiritually sensitive person is aware that there is such a thing as the nes of teva [miracle of nature].

Yaakov Avinu was on such a level. He realized that everything in nature was also miraculous. For Yaakov, sending two human beings to meet Eisav or sending two Angels to meet Eisav was the same thing. The missions would be equally miraculous. That which the Almighty is hesitant to make miracles on a daily basis and that about which He subtracts from a person's merits is for people who are amazed at miracles but are not amazed at nature. A person such as Yaakov, who viewed all of

life as a miracle, would not have his merits diminished by invoking a "miracle miracle," which for him was no different than a "natural miracle".

The Talmud relates the incident of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who lit vinegar because he did not have any oil to provide illumination. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa proclaimed that the same G-d who decrees that oil should cause illumination can make vinegar cause illumination as well. For Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, everything was miraculous - oil burning was no less miraculous than vinegar burning.

The Talmud states (Sanhedrin 94) that the Almighty contemplated making King Chizkiyahu the Moshiach [Messiah] and Sancheriv King of Ashur the embodiment of Gog and Magog. However, the At tribute of Justice protested that it would not be fair inasmuch as David who recited so many psalms and praises to G-d was passed over and not made Moshiach while Chizkiyahu who witnessed so many miracles and did not sing a song of praise and thanksgiving would be made Moshiach. G-d accepted the complaint. At that moment the earth opened up its mouth and proclaimed: "I will recite your praises and in this merit, You may make this righteous one (King Chizkiyah) the Moshiach."

What does this Gemara mean? Why in fact did Chizkiyahu not sing praises to G-d? Rav Moshe answers that Chizkiyahu did not say Shirah [songs of praise] because he was not impressed by miracles. For Chizkiyahu, everything was miraculous. Therefore, "miracle miracles" were not that different than "nature miracles" and they did not move him to sing Shirah. That is what is meant by the earth offering to say Shirah in his place. The earth represents nature. The earth is explaining why Chizkiyahu did not respond to the miracles - it was because he saw even the works of the earth - nature itself - in a miraculous vein.

Chanukah will be upon us in a few short weeks. We will soon come across the most famous Beis Yosef in all of Shulchan Aruch. The Beis Yosef asks why the holiday of Chanukah was established for 8 days, inasmuch as there was enough oil for one day, the fact that it burned 8 days represented only 7 days of miracle!

The Baalei Mussar answer that in fact 7 days commemorates the miraculous miracle of oil burning longer than it was supposed to, but the extra day commemorates the miracle of nature - that oil burns at all! That itself is miraculous. We are typically amazed at miracles of the first kind, however there are miracles present in our every day lives. It behooves us to appreciate those miracles as well.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayishlach are provided below:

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