

MISTAKING THE ANGEL OF MERCY FOR THE SATAN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Balak

Mistaking The Angel of Mercy For The Satan

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 731, Shkia - 7:02: Mincha 7:00 A Problem? Good Shabbos!

"Bilaam got up early, he saddled his donkey and he accompanied the officers of Moav. G-d was angered that he went and He placed an Angel of G-d on the road to prevent him." [Bamidbar 22:22] Rashi identifies the angel as an angel of mercy. G-d tried to stop Bilaam with an angel of mercy because He wanted to stop Bilaam from doing what he was about to do to himself (engage in an activity that would ultimately lead to his own death).

However, the pasuk later says that the donkey saw the angel and he was holding a drawn sword. Since when would an "angel of mercy" be carrying a drawn sword? What happened to the merciful angel that Hashem sent to save Bilaam from carrying out his ill-conceived mission?

Rav Pam once beautifully observed that the angel of mercy can appear in all different types of guises and costumes. Sometimes he appears as the scariest creature we have ever seen. Its job is to stop us from doing what we are doing - for our own good! He will do whatever it takes him to accomplish that mission. The "merciful" aspect of the angel is not his appearance or his facial expression -- it is the fact that he is stopping someone from hurting himself.

Rav Pam mentioned this to his Yeshiva students in the context of disappointments they may encounter along the road to finding their designated life's partner. A young man may meet a young woman and think this is the greatest shidduch that can ever happen. He is so excited and full of anticipation and then something happens to derail it. Suddenly, the imminent shidduch is called off. Naturally, the boy and his family are very distraught and full of disappointment.

Many times in life -- we realize later -- that the cause of our momentary disappointment was the greatest thing that ever happened to us. The Ribono shel Olam knows better. He knows that this first one was not the right one. The more appropriate match will yet appear in the future.

When the shidduch broke, it appeared as tragic, as a calamity, as an angel with a drawn sword in his hand. However, the truth of the matter is that it was an angel of mercy. The angel of mercy does not always appear with a halo. He can sometimes appear in a horrible guise. But if that stops a person from doing something harmful to himself then the "mission of mercy" has succeeded.

This does not only apply to matrimonial matches. It applies to a person's whole life. It applies to business deals, to buying homes, and to all kinds of financial moves that a person places much faith in only to see them turn out to be great disappointments. Many times, the short term disappointment which caused him to change his original plans or goals turns out to have been the greatest blessing that could have happened.

Before Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky came to America, he applied for a certain Rabbinical position in Europe. He lost the job to another candidate. Rav Yaakov was disappointed by that turn of events. He needed to earn a livelihood so he had no choice but to travel to America. For a time, he was in Seattle, Washington and for a time he was in Toronto, Canada. He ultimately wound up in Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and became its great Rosh Yeshiva and the rest is history. The Rav whom he lost to in Europe as well as that entire city where he wanted the Rabbinate were totally wiped out by the Nazis.

There are thousands of stories like this. Many times, we think we are halted by the Satan who derails our plans. Often we are mistaken - the angel we think is the Satan is really the Malach haRachamim [Angel of Mercy]. The Master of the World had greater plans in mind for Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky, but at that time it appeared to him like an angel with a sword drawn against him.

We must always bear this in mind. We cannot judge anything by its cover, not even angels.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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