

Parshat HaShavuah

VAYISHLACH

DEC 10, 2011

וישלח
י"ד כסלו תשע"ב

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חלקינו

מה טוב

Ashreinu

Candle Lighting

5:11

S"Z Kriat Shema

9:35

Sunset

5:29

Motzei
Shabbat

6:07

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?

RABBI ALLAN HOUBEN

As the parsha opens, and the dramatic meeting between Yaakov and Esav rapidly approaches, Yaakov sends men to his brother to deliver a message and size up his brother's temperament. The Torah refers to these messengers as "*malachim*," leading the Midrash Breishit Rabbah to question if these men are actual angels, or merely human messengers who are at times referred to with the same moniker.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his Igrot Moshe, asks two very simple questions on these divergent viewpoints in the midrash. If in fact these messengers are angels, why would Yaakov send messengers in this kind of miraculous fashion, when sending ordinary human messengers would have accomplished the same goal. And if in fact these messengers are humans, why would the Torah refer to them as "*malachim*," leaving the meaning ambiguous for the reader, when it could just as easily have used the term "*shluchim*"?

Rav Moshe answers that for an individual who is a "*shaleim*," complete in his understanding and belief of Hashem, there is ultimately no difference between "*teva*" and "*neis*," nature and miracles. Since Hashem created the world and the laws of nature that sustain it, there is no greater *neis* than the remarkable nature we see everyday.

Thus, to Yaakov, there is no real difference as to whether he sends ordinary earthly messengers or, with a little help from Hashem, supernatural messengers, or whether in reality they are angels or humans.

The wording of the pasuk conveys a critical message about how we must view and appreciate the world. Rav Moshe even goes so far as to suggest that one who is more "wowed" by supernatural miracles than the natural ones we observe daily is actually displaying a slight lack of faith.

Continued page 4





VIOLENCE IS NEVER THE ANSWER

Yael Guttman ('13)

In Parshat Vayishlach, the Torah tells us, “The angels returned to Yaakov saying, “We came to your brother Esav and he is also coming to greet you and four hundred men are with him.””

Rashi explains that upon hearing this message, Yaakov experiences two different emotions: fear that Esav would kill him, and distress that he himself might have to kill others.

Rabbi Label Lam explains that it is easy to relate to Yaakov's fear of death, considering that he is about to confront his infuriated brother who is marching toward him with 400 men.

However, Rabbi Lam questions: How can one imagine that Yaakov has even the slightest chance of a military victory when he is clearly outnumbered by Esav?

In last week's parsha, while in Charan, Yaakov approaches a group of shepherds who are squatting by a well of water which has a large rock on top of it. Three flocks had already gathered there, and were waiting for the rest of the flocks to arrive before attempting to remove the rock.

The Torah says that when Rachel appears with the sheep, “Yaakov draws close and he reveals the stone from on top of the well and he waters the sheep of Lavan the brother of his mother.” Rashi clarifies that Yaakov does not even roll the rock off the well; he simply pulls it out, similar to uncorking a bottle. From here we see the tremendous strength of Yaakov.

Yaakov is not a weak man who is afraid of being beat up by his brother; he is a man who seeks to avoid confrontation, and thus sends gifts to his brother to try to placate his anger. One can easily understand that Yaakov is wrestling with an internal struggle.

Yaakov is straddling the sides of defending himself and utilizing his tremendous strength to defeat his own brother. His consequent course of action, giving gifts, is not an act of weakness, but rather an act of strength. He understands that problems could be solved without engaging in physical confrontation. He uses his strength to devise more strategic method for dealing with his brother.

STAY STRONG

Rebecca Muller ('13)

This week, when Yaakov and Esav finally meet, Yaakov warns Esav, “I have lived with Lavan.”

How is this simple statement a warning to Esav not to start up with Yaakov?

Rashi points out that the phrase “I have lived”—“*Garti*” has the *gematriya*, numerical value, of 613, which equals the amount of mitzvot in the Torah.

Continued page 3





Muller continued

Hence, when informing Esav that he has lived in Lavan's home for many years, Yaakov is really expressing that not only did he live with Lavan, but he also lived there while still keeping Hashem's mitzvot despite Lavan's *avoda zara*.

Yaakov does not give into the peer pressure surrounding him because of his dedication to serving Hashem. We see from this accomplishment that it was even more impressive for Yaakov, a man on such a high spiritual level, to stand above the pressure around him and not sin.

Nowadays, this lesson applies more than ever as we are surrounded by so many influences that are contradictory to our Jewish values. It is genuinely difficult to overcome peer pressure and stay true to our beliefs – it is even hard for Yaakov!

However, we must always remember what is truly important to us in life and hold onto our values with passion, just like Yaakov holds on to his mitzvot in Lavan's home.

MADE YA LOOK GABRIELLA SOBOL ('13)

In this week's parsha, Yaakov fights with an angel over the course of a long night. After winning the battle, he refuses to let the angel go until the angel gives him a blessing.

When the angel says that Yaakov's name will be changed to Yisrael, Yaakov asks the angel in return what *his* name is. The angel's cryptic response is "Why do you ask my name?"

Rabbi Frand ponders what the implications are of this confusing dialogue. We know that this angel is really the guardian angel of Esav, also known as the Satan (Evil Inclination). Rav Leib Chasman explains that a name represents a person's essence, so when Yaakov asks the angel's name, he is asking what the *yetzer harah's* essence truly is.

R' Chasman explains that the angel's response is essentially that there is no point in asking this question, as the *yetzer harah* is not an actual being; rather, it is a figment of man's imagination when he desires to do something wrong.

This can be compared to someone who sees a shadow on a wall and is frightened by it. A million different scenarios play out in their mind of what this horrible creature could be. Yet, when they turn on the light, they realize that there is nothing there- the entire scenario is a product of their overactive imagination. This is the situation that occurs with the *yetzer harah*.

From here we learn that when we have the desire to do something wrong, and the urge is so great that we feel the *yetzer harah* pushing us in a certain direction, we must stop and realize that we are the ones in control. The *yetzer harah* does not really exist if we do not want it to; we are our own worst enemy. It is up to us to see our *yetzer harah* for what it really is, and understand that it is in our power to overcome it.



WAR TACTICS— YAAKOV STYLE

FRANCINE SZERER ('15)

Have you ever been in a situation where you are fighting with someone? How could you make things better between you? In this week's parsha, Yaakov Avinu uses three different tactics in order to create peace with his brother Esav.

After Yaakov leaves Lavan's house, he learns that Esav is coming to meet him with four hundred men. Yaakov does not know if Esav is still angry with him for receiving their father's blessing, and therefore, uses three tactics to prepare for their encounter.

The first tactic used is sending a large gift of different kinds of livestock to Esav. He does this so Esav will forgive him. The second tactic he uses is to pray to Hashem expressing his feelings of humility, and thanking Him for everything. His third and last tactic is to prepare for battle.

We can learn from Yaakov's actions that when you are fighting with someone there are three things you should do: First, you should try to appease them with a gift to show them you no longer want to fight with them. Second, you should pray to Hashem and ask Him to help you. If you sincerely follow the first two tactics, then hopefully you will be successful in making peace and will not require the third tactic.

Rabbi Houben continued

The Ramban shares this same view on the nature of *teva* and *neis*. Towards the end of Parshat Bo, while discussing the myriad of miracles performed for Bnei Yisrael throughout the exodus process, the Ramban explains that the difference between *teva* and *neis* is simply frequency- what we are used to seeing. Imagine that you grew up during the 40 years of wandering in the desert. If anyone asked you about food, you would have said, "Just as the sun rises every morning, food falls from the sky everyday." You would have been convinced that the existence of the *mon* was *teva*, and not a tremendous *neis* performed by Hashem to allow the *dor hamidbar* to be sustained.

Too many of us look at our lives as the *dor hamidbar* looked at the *mon*. We wake up each morning, as expected, and go about our daily lives as if totally unaware we are the recipients of miracles from Hashem. I believe this is the reason why we begin every morning with a series of brachot whose sole purpose is not to allow us to take our lives and the gifts we have for granted.

From *Modeh Ani* to *Asher Yatzar* and *Birchot Hashachar*, we are bombarded by brachot that force us to focus on the ordinary and mundane aspects of our life that we might otherwise attribute to nature. As we have begun *Chodesh Kislev* and Chanukah is fast approaching, it behooves us, in this month highlighted by a celebration of miracles, to take note of the "*nisecha shebchol yom imanu*;" to look at the world through the glasses of Yaakov *avinu*, and appreciate all that Hashem does for us on a daily basis.

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