

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Vayishlach	24 Nov 2018	16 Kislev 5779	Gen. 32:3 -36:43	Oba. 1:1-21	Matt. 2:13-23

“And Ya’akov sent messengers.” (Gen. 32:3) In Hebrew, it is read “וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו” (*vai-yish-lach ya-'a-kov mal-'a-chim le-fa-nav*). While *mal-'a-chim* is translated as ‘messengers’, it can also be translated as ‘angels.’ As always, when a language has been translated into another language, it is easy to lose its intended meanings. Thus, when we read this verse in English, it seems like Ya’akov sent people to deliver messages.

We will start with a view in English translation. Our parasha describes Ya’akov was very fearful of Esav and sent messengers to appease him while he was praying to Hashem to rescue him. Yet there was no response from Hashem. In Genesis 28:15, 31:3, and 46:4, Ya’akov was assured by Hashem that He would be with Ya’akov. In Psalms 17:13, it says “Rise up, YHWH, precede him and bring him to his knees; rescue my soul from the wicked one, who is Your sword.” The sages teach that Hashem will “rise” somewhat to help David and others who pray to Him.<sup>1</sup> But He will not “rise fully,” for His glory will not be appreciated properly if it is revealed constantly.<sup>2</sup>

There are two angels that guides our lives daily. They are Good Inclination (Yetzer Tov) and Evil Inclination (Yetzer Ra). When we do something good, then the Good Inclination has dominion over Evil Inclination. In practical term, there are times when we know that the action is negative, yet something propels us to engage anyway even though we don’t really want to. This is the work of Yetzer Tov and Yetzer Ra. They are in constant battle against each other to control over our behavior.

When a man is born, the Yetzer Ra enters him as it is written, “sin crouches at the door.” (Gen. 4:7) R’ Yehuda<sup>3</sup> and Antiochus once had a discussion of ‘when a sin enters our body.’ R’ Yehuda said, “from the moment when the baby is in her womb.” Antiochus said, “the moment a baby is born.” R’ Yehuda said, “You are right” as he refers to Genesis 4:7. So, the Yetzer Ra enters at the opening of womb, that is at a person’s birth.

King David calls the Yetzer Ra as “sin”, as it is written, “and my sin is ever before me.” (Psa. 51:5) This is because Yetzer Ra tempts man to sin before our Creator every day. And it will never leave us until the day we die. The sages comment that the Yetzer Tov will enter us when we are thirteen years old. For a woman, it is twelve years old. Now, these Yetzer (Inclinations) watches over us. For example, if we do something good, then the Yetzer Ra helps him do good as it is being dominated by the Yetzer Tov.

Therefore, when Ya’akov was finally freed from Lavan, “the heavenly angels of Elohim met him.” (Gen. 32:1) This verse describes “angels” in plural form. But in verse 2, and 3 describes them as a singular form, meaning the Shekinah was with him. And Ya’akov sent these angels, specifically the Shekinah to Esav. This is the meaning of “And Ya’akov sent messengers before him.” (Gen. 32:3)

<sup>1</sup> Psalms 17:13

<sup>2</sup> The Midrash, 75:1

<sup>3</sup> R’ Yehuda HaNassi who compiled Oral Law and Mishnah

There are two types of angels mentioned in the Torah as *mal-'a-chim* “angels” (Gen. 32:3) in this week’s *parasha* and *mal-'a-ch* “angel” (Gen. 33:14). When it is said in the singular form, this is reference to the Shekinah. Meaning that Ya’akov was not only surrounded by the “angels” but the Shekinah was with him. The Shekinah is a feminine aspect of Hashem. We can find many verses where the Shekinah went ahead of Yisrael. The Shekinah was with the Yisraelites even when the Northern Tribes were exiled in 786 BCE. During the Second Temple period, the Shekinah was not present. However, the Shekinah revealed Herself here and there throughout the generations.

When a person is Hashem fearing person, then the Shekinah dwells above that person and inspires, motivates a person to do *mitzvah*. And we feel good when we do the *mitzvah*. Because it is the Shekinah, the Divine Presence that dwells in us. The greatest gift is the Presence of Shekinah when our Messiah returns.

The opposite, the greatest punishment of all is when the Shekinah is not present. Many people fear of going to Gehinnom for punishment. We should remember that Gehinnom is a place of cleansing of our sins so we can be closer to Hashem. While our soul is being cleansed, the Shekinah is not present or connected with us. That is the greatest punishment, the absence of the Divine Presence. Such was the case with Ya’akov when he alone stayed at the “ford of Yavok.”

According to the Midrash, Ya’akov had no reason to fear of Esav. Devorah, Rivkah’s nurse came to Ya’akov (Yashar 31:22; Midrash 27:45) and told Ya’akov that Esav’s anger subsided and he should return home. At that time, he completed his second 7-year contract with Lavan. And he went and told Lavan that he wished to return to Canaan. Again, Lavan made a deal (Gen. 30:27) and Ya’akov stayed for another 6 years, totaling 20 years with Lavan before returning home. Thus begins our *parasha* for this week.

“And Ya’akov sent messengers before him to Esav his brother to the land of Seir, the country of Edom.” (Gen. 32:3) The sages explain the behavior of Ya’akov by using Psalms 17:13, “Rise up, YHWH, precede him and bring him to his knees; rescue my soul from the wicked one, who is Your sword.” The first part of this verse was already explained. So, the next part, “him” refers to Esav and his descendants. Other Midrash presumes that Gog is presumed to be a descendant of Esav.<sup>4</sup> So, David is saying, “precede the evildoer (Esav) before he precedes You.” Yefeh To’ar, cited by Eitz Yosef explains: If he has accrued merits due to good deeds he may have performed, reward him quickly for those deeds so that his merits will be completely “used up” and he will not be able to ask Hashem to reward him by giving him the ability to harm Yisrael. Esav acquired great merit through honoring his father Yitzchak. So, Hashem should reward him now instead of later to harm Ya’akov.

“Bring him to his knees,” rather “force him to receive an unfavorable judgment, or break him (Psa. 20:8) “Rescue my soul from the wicked one, who is Your sword,” does not make sense. There are several homiletic interpretation of which I will list one. The Midrash says, “Rescue my soul from that wicked one (Esav), who is Your sword with which you subjugate Your world.” Hashem uses Edom as His tool to execute His judgment on those that needs punishment. (Isa. 10:5)

Putting all these explanations together, Ya’akov was in great fear of Esav when he did not have. As previously mention, Esav’s anger subsided. If not, his mother would not have sent her maid to bring him back home. Therefore, sending a humble message to Esav was not warranted.

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<sup>4</sup> Eshed HaNechalim

The Midrash explains that Esav was on his way to Seir and had no intention of attacking him until Ya'akov sent messengers and saying, "So said your servant Ya'akov." (v. 5) Such unnecessary behavior (humility and fear), Ya'akov aroused Esav to turn toward his direction with 400 soldiers. A righteous person who causes himself to fall before the evildoer by being afraid cease to fully trust in Hashem. Therefore, Ya'akov's unnecessary humiliation angered Hashem and the Shekinah left Ya'akov.<sup>5</sup>

Now, why was Ya'akov did not have to humiliate himself? The Midrash explains: (i) He feared the merit of Esav's honoring his father since Hashem rewards Esav in other ways (Gen. Ch. 36). (ii) He feared and Esav as a powerful warlord whom Hashem granted Esav to serve Him as His tool to punish the wicked. (iii) He should not have feared Esav that Esav would succeed in harming him on account of Yitzchak's blessing, since the blessing was dependent on his (Esav) serving Ya'akov as said, "the elder shall serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23) (iv) He should not given respect to Esav as he was wicked and was destined to fall by the "sword of Hashem." Thus, Hashem "hid His face" as Ya'akov did not have complete trust in Him and the Shekinah left him and Ya'akov suffered financially and physically.

In verse 24, the Torah says that Ya'akov "was left alone." Meaning, that he led himself in danger by remaining alone at night. For the angels deserted him, for the angels were there to protect him from only unseen dangers. Since, Hashem had promised that He will protect Ya'akov, he should not have humbled himself in front of Esav. For this reason, the angels left him alone with the officer appointed for Esav, who arrived with heavenly approval as the night was under the control of Esav, meaning the left side without the right. However, Hashem continued to guard Ya'akov enough that the Esav's officer could not overcome him. The Esav's officer looked to the right of Ya'akov and saw the Perfection of the Right (Avraham / Chesed). He then looked to the left and saw the Perfection of the Left (Yitzchak / Gevurah). Since the body of Ya'akov comprised of both columns, he was the Perfection of the Center (Ya'akov / Tiferet). Since, the Yetzer Ra can only hold on to the imperfection, he could not overcome Ya'akov.

Now, let us discuss about Dinah. In verse 34:1, the Scripture says, "And Dinah the daughter of Leah." The Midrash wonders why the Scripture says, "the daughter of Leah" instead of 'the daughter of Ya'akov. Then it explains by using parables in Ezekiel 16:44 which says, "Like mother, like daughter." The unfortunate event that occurred was blamed to Ya'akov rather than Dinah.

The Midrash explains that Ya'akov withheld kindness from his brother by refusing to allow him to marry Dinah. For such an act would cause Esav, as a wife Dinah might have persuaded Esav to repent his evil ways as she can have a positive influence on her husband. Instead, she married Yyov (Job).<sup>6</sup>

Ya'akov promised that once he returned home, he would go to the place where his father lived. (Gen. 28:21) Instead of keeping his promised, he pitched his tent in Shechem. Thus, Hashem said, "It is your fault that this happened by not keeping your promise." Thus, Hashem now commands Ya'akov to return by keeping his vows. (Gen. 35:1)

In Genesis 34:8, it says "The being of my son Shechem longs for your daughter." The Midrash asks a question, why the Torah is going out of its way to describe "love." Then it answers by saying there are three types of love that we can express ourselves. The first level of love is "clinging" which must be initiated by our own spiritual arousal by clinging to Hashem. The second level of love is "desiring" which is initiated by Hashem. However, this level of love depends on our behavior. The highest level of love is "longing" as it occur in the Messianic era as said in Malachi 3:12, "And all nations shall call you blessed: for you shall

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<sup>5</sup> Zohar, 166a

<sup>6</sup> Midrah 80:4

be a land of delight (meaning ‘longing’), say YHWH *tzeva'oth*.” So, Hashem is teaching us how we can love one another by duplicating His love for us as He expressed His love through the soul that He has given us. Thus, we develop our love begins with exclusive feelings for a particular woman. It then proceeds to the blossoming of these feelings and her pursuit. And the final act of winning her heart and joining her in marriage.

So, the first step of loving Hashem is to devote one’s thoughts to Hashem and develop a desire for Him that exceed one’s love for anyone or anything else. The next step is to pursue this type of love and strengthen that love by ridding oneself of material pursuits. The final step is to perform the mitzvos with one’s entire heart and soul where his heart only desire for Hashem as one cannot delay doing so even for a moment – just as Shechem did not delay because he longed for Dinah.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, 80:7