



# Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah miTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayishlach

13 Kislev 5774/November 16, 2013

Vol. 5 Num. 10

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## Of Malachim and Men, Part 2

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

"And Yaakov sent *malachim* before him to his brother, Esav, to the land of Seir, the fields of Edom. (Bereishit 32:4)"

The word *malach* admits two interpretations: 1) a heavenly being, or 2) any being sent to perform a task (*melachah*). A midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 75:4) offers both interpretations in identifying Yaakov's *malachim*; one view contends that they were flesh and blood, and the other contends that they were actual heavenly beings. But why is there a disagreement? We will suggest four ways to understand the dispute:

### 1: A matter of language

This is a debate regarding the Torah's presentation of the story:

- On the one hand, Yaakov sends these *malachim* immediately after encountering a camp of heavenly *malachim* (Bereishit 32:2-3), indicating that the *malachim* he sends are from that celestial group.
- On the other hand, that camp was described as a group of *malachei Elokim*, servants of G-d, and Yaakov's emissaries are described only as *malachim*; this supports the view that the *malachim* of Yaakov were mere men.

### 2: The function of a malach

This is a debate regarding whether a human being can command heavenly beings:

- According to the first view, a human cannot command *malachim* created to serve G-d; these must be human beings.

- In the other view, Yaakov is able to instruct those who were formed to carry out the Divine will.

### 3: Co-existence with Esav

A third approach is that this is a debate about the correctness of the mission which Yaakov assigns to the *malachim*; perhaps a human being can instruct a *malach*, but only where his instructions dovetail with the Divine will. [Similarly, see Yehoshua 10:14 on the ability of a human being to "instruct" G-d, and Sifri Devarim 306 on the ability of the righteous to instruct the servants of G-d.] The debate here is whether G-d wished for Yaakov to contact Esav:

- In one view, supported in a midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 75:3), Yaakov should not contact Esav; he is like a person who grabs the ears of a passing dog. Therefore, Yaakov is only able to send human messengers.
- The opposing view contends that Yaakov is right for contacting Esav; perhaps Hashem wished for Yaakov and Esav to attempt to live together in Israel. Therefore, his instructions were carried out by Divine emissaries. [A similar view may be seen in the midrashic contention that Yaakov should have permitted Esav to wed Dinah. (Midrash Tanchuma Vayishlach 19)]

### 4: The humbling of Yaakov

Finally, one might suggest that this is a debate about the acceptability of the message Yaakov sent to Esav. In sending his message, Yaakov identifies himself as "your servant, Yaakov," and he calls his brother, "my master, Esav." This act of humbling himself before

Esav was controversial among the sages; a midrash even links Esav's early empire-building success with Yaakov's kowtowing before him. (Bereishit Rabbah 75:11, and see *ibid.* 75:6)

The debate would continue through the ages. Millenia after the events of our parshah, Rabbi Yehudah haNasi sent a message to Roman Emperor Antonines with the opening words, "From your servant, Yehudah, to our master, King Antoninus." When his scribe protested, Rabbi Yehudah haNasi replied, "Am I a n y b e t t e r t h a n m y grandfather?" (Bereishit Rabbah 75:5)

Perhaps, then, this was the rabbinical debate:

- One sage contended that Yaakov is correct for humbling himself before Esav, and therefore he is empowered to send Divine agents to carry this message to Esav.
- The other view argues that Yaakov's humble approach to Esav is inappropriate. Yaakov cannot command Heavenly forces to carry such a message; these words could be conveyed only by flesh and blood.

There is more to be said about this midrash, and its possible lessons and levels of interpretation. More than twenty of your fellow Torontonians undertake this sort of analysis at Shaarei Shomayim every Tuesday at 12:30 PM, in the *Living Midrash* series we present with the support of *Mekorot*. If this article piqued your interest, please come join us!

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### OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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**Who is the prophet of our haftorah?**

Several men in Tanach are named "Ovadia", but two, who lived roughly two hundred years after King David, are the most likely candidates to have been the prophet of our haftorah:

- One, an officer of King Yehoshaphat, taught Torah in the southern Jewish kingdom of Yehudah (Divrei haYamim II 17:7). Rav Saadia Gaon contends that this is the prophet of our haftorah.
- The second served King Achav, and is described as G-d-fearing (Melachim I 18:3). He is also credited with saving the prophets of G-d when Queen Izevel tried to murder them. The sages of the Talmud (Sanhedrin 39b) believe that this latter Ovadia is the prophet of our haftorah. Ibn Ezra disagreed with this identification, because this Ovadia was not identified as a prophet in the biblical account of his service to Achav, but Abarbanel counters that he may have become a prophet only afterward.

As noted by the sages of the Talmud (Sanhedrin 89a), there is a strong resemblance between Ovadia's prophecy and Yirmiyahu 49.

**What is the message of our haftorah?**

Our haftorah, the only non-Yom Tov haftorah consisting of an entire book of Tanach, is a message of destruction for Esav's descendants, the nation of Edom. [Bereishit 36 explicitly identifies Edom as the descendants of Esav.]

Edom occupied the area which is currently southern Jordan; in

approximately the fourth century BCE, the Nabatean Arabs drove Edom west into the Judean Desert. The Chashmonaim ultimately conquered Edom, but the sages viewed the Romans as heirs of Esav/Edom, perhaps because Edomites had a presence in Rome (Radak to Ovadia 1) or because Edom supported Rome (Ibn Ezra to Bereishit 27:40), or because Edomites were early supporters of Christianity (Ibn Ezra to Bereishit 27:40).

The relationship between the Jews and Edom is hostile from the start; Edom refuses to allow the Jews to pass through their land on their way into Canaan (Bamidbar 20:14-21). King David battles them (Shemuel II 8:13-14, and see Ramban to Bereishit 27:40 and Radak to Shemuel II 8:13). Edom attacked the Jews as well, in the days of King Yehoshaphat (Divrei haYamim II 20) and King Achaz (Divrei haYamim II 28). They attacked again when the first Beit haMikdash was destroyed (Eichah 4:21, Tehillim 137:4), and when the second Beit haMikdash was destroyed (Amos 1:9-12).

There are many reasons for the bitter enmity between the Jews and Edom, including: their heritage from Esav, their attacks against the Jews, and their relationship with Esav's grandson Amalek. Ovadia predicts the downfall of Edom as punishment for their sins against the Jews, and he envisions a time of redemption for the Jews.

The link between our parshah's focus on Esav and Ovadia's prophecy regarding Esav's descendants is clear. Further, though, a midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 78:14) says that when Yaakov pledged to meet Esav in Seir (Bereishit 33:14), he was referring to Ovadia 1:21, which predicts an ultimate reunion of Yaakov and Esav at Seir.

**France and Spain?**

The penultimate verse in Ovadia refers to a Jewish exile which reaches *Tzarfat* and *Sfarad*, names which correspond with France and Spain in modern Hebrew. Rashi and Ibn Ezra suggest that the prophet could be referring to the sites of modern France and Spain. However, Daat Mikra suggests that *Tzarfat* could be the Phoenician city of Sarepta, and *Sfarad* could be Sardis, which we know hosted a synagogue during the Roman era.

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## 613 Mitzvot: #313, 315-317

### Observing Yom Kippur

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The tenth day of the month of Tishrei, Yom Kippur, is set aside for Divine forgiveness. As the *Sefer haChinuch* says (mitzvah 313), "Among G-d's kindnesses toward His creations is this: He established a single day of the year to atone for sins with repentance... Therefore, we are instructed to fast on this day; food, drink and the pleasures of touch awaken physicality, drawing us after desire and sin, and they prevent the wise soul from pursuing truth, which is the service of G-d, and His good and sweet guidance for all intelligent beings. It is also inappropriate for a servant, on the day when he comes to judgment before his Master, to come with a soul that is darkened and confused by food and drink, and thoughts of the material life in which he is immersed. One is judged only based upon his deeds of that moment, and so it would be good for him to elevate his wise spirit and humble the material before it on that honoured day, so that it might be suited, ready to achieve atonement, without the obstruction of the veil of material desires." Therefore, we fast and we avoid other physical pleasures: marital relations, bathing and rubbing ointments into our skin, and wearing leather shoes (mitzvah 313, 316).

We also refrain from *melachah* on Yom Kippur; as we have seen regarding Shabbat and Yom Tov, we are obligated to refrain from *melachah* as well as to create an atmosphere of rest. (mitzvah 315, 317) The *Sefer haChinuch* notes, "This is so that we will not be distracted by any matter, and we will be able to turn all of our thoughts and concentration to seeking forgiveness from the Master of all, on this day which has been prepared for forgiveness of sin since the world was created."

In truth, we are taught that the first Yom Kippur in human history was when Moshe returned from Sinai with the second set of *luchot*, demonstrating that the Jews had been forgiven after the sin of the Golden Calf [see Rashi to Shemot 18:13 for the chronology]. However, *Sefer haChinuch* is referring to a midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 2:3) which links Yom Kippur with the earliest stages of Creation.

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**Biography**  
**Rabbi Avraham**  
**ben haRambam**  
**Rabbi Baruch Weintraub**

Rabbi Avraham Ben HaRambam was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, 4946 (1168). His father, Rambam, was 51 years old when Rabbi Avraham was born. When young Avraham was fifteen, his father wrote about him in one of his letters:

"In worldly matters I have no comfort, aside from two things: when I learn and look at what I learn, and in my son Avraham, who was shown favour by G-d, and who was blessed from the blessings of the one after whom he is named... because he is most humble and modest among men, and that is combined with good traits. He also possesses a highly refined intellect and good nature, and surely, G-d willing, he will have a name among the greats..."

When his father passed away in 1204, young Rabbi Avraham took upon himself to continue in his father's oath. He did this in the public sphere, where he became the official *Nagid* (leader) of Egyptian Jewry, administered Cairo's general hospital, and served as the king's personal physician. Perhaps more importantly, he did likewise in the spiritual realm; a major part of his work was devoted to defending his father's positions. His books *Birkat Avraham* and *Maasei Nisim* defend his father's *Mishneh Torah*, and his *Milchamot Hashem* discusses his father's *Moreh haNevuchim* (Guide of the Perplexed).

Rabbi Avraham did not limit himself to perpetuating his father's legacy; he continued to develop it, and at certain points he diverged from it. The most crucial point, arguably, is his embrace of pietism, especially in the Sufi form he saw in the Muslim world. Rabbi Avraham claimed that this pietest way was taken from an early Jewish origin; therefore, following the Sufis meant reclaiming our old heritage. This approach led him to emphasize pietism over intellect, differing from his father's way. His main book, *HaMaspik l'Ovdei Hashem* (The Comprehensive Guide for the Servants of G-d), expanded on these views.

He is overshadowed by his great father, but Rabbi Avraham's influence in his generation was great. Followers of his path continued to foster a Jewish-Sufi form of pietism for at least a century, and through his influence a large Egyptian Karaite community returned to the fold of Rabbinic Judaism.

Rabbi Avraham's passed away on the 18<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, 4998 (1327).

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**Torah and Translation**  
**Yaakov's Struggle**  
**Rabbi Avraham ben haRambam**

**Commentary to Bereishit 32**  
**Translated by Rabbi Baruch Weintraub**

**ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו. אחר שהתבודד יעקב עליו השלום בלבדו התבודדות גשמית, ולא נשאר אצלו עבדים וחפצים, נתעלה באותה ההתבודדות הגשמית אל ההתבודדות הרוחנית אשר בסופה השיג השגת נבואה, שנדמה לו בה כאילו יאבק איש עמו...**

**ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו. ואל תתמה איך אירע זה במצב שאינו מציאות אלא בדמיון, שהרי האדם יראה בחלומו כאילו הוא נוסע וייקץ עיף, ויראה בחלומו כאילו הכו אותו וייקץ ברגש של כאב לפי שהאברים מתפעלים על ידי כח הדמיון. ואם יהיה כך על ידי השפעת החלום הרגיל כל שכן שיהיה על ידי השפעת מראה הנבואה:**

**ויאמר שלחני. זה מורה, כמו שבארו הקדמונים זכרונם לברכה, כי יעקב עליו השלום דבק בדביקותו גם אחרי מה שאירע לו בכף ירכו. וזה מחזקת יעקב עליו השלום בחזיונו הנפלא המבשר לו על חזקתו העצומה בשעת תעורתו:**

**כי שרית. בישרו כי עשו לא יתגבר עליו ולא ינצחנו, והטעם בזה שמכיון ששרית... כל שכן שתהיה כך לשר עם אנשים...**

**למה זה תשאל לשמי. בשאלת יעקב לשם המלאך המדבר אליו רמז אל בקשתו סודות אלוקיים שלא קדמה לו ידיעה בהם. ובתשובתו של המלאך למה זה תשאל לשמי, רמז כי התכלית המבוקשת נמנעת עם מציאות דביקות בגשמיות דומה למאמר כי לא יראני האדם וחי'."**

**ויברך אתו שם. רמז אל התעלותו של יעקב בסודות וידיעות התעלות יתירה על מדריגתו בעת ההיא:**

**And Yaakov remained alone, and a man struggled with him.** After Yaakov, peace be on him, had physically secluded himself, and neither servants nor objects were left with him, he was elevated from that physical seclusion to a spiritual one, at the end of which he achieved prophecy. It seemed to him at though a man was struggling with him...

**And the socket of Yaakov's hip became dislocated as he wrestled with him.** You need not wonder how this happened in a situation which was not reality but a vision, for a man can dream that he is travelling and upon waking feel tired; or one can see in his dream that he is being beaten, and wake up feeling pain, because the body is affected by the power of imagination. And if this is the effect of a regular dream, how much more so is the effect of a prophetic vision.

**And he said: Send me away.** [The angel begging Yaakov to release him] shows, as the ancient ones explained, that Yaakov, peace be upon him, clung to his devotion [to G-d] even after what happened to his hip's socket. This was a result of Yaakov's great strength in his marvellous dream, a precursor of the great strength Yaakov would have upon waking.

**For you have commanded.** [The angel] informed him that Esav would not overcome him and defeat him. The reason for that was, "for you have commanded angelic beings," all the more so will you command human beings...

**Why is it that you ask for my name.** In Yaakov's inquiry for the angel's name he hinted at his quest after Divine secrets, which he did not yet possess. And in the angel's answer, "Why is it that you ask for my name," he hinted that the sought-after goal could not be realized while clinging to a material reality. That is similar to the statement, "Man cannot see me, and live."

**And he blessed him there.** This hints at Yaakov's elevation in secrets and knowledge, above his level, at that time.

## This Week in Israeli History: Kislev 17, 1947 The United Nations Partition Vote

Josh Gutenberg

*Wednesday is the 17<sup>th</sup> of Kislev*

The British Mandate controlled Palestine in the period following World War I. However, escalating tensions between the Arab and Jewish populations in Palestine, and attacks by the Jewish resistance forces on the British government in response to strict policies on Jewish immigration, prompted the British government to surrender their rights in Palestine. They sent a request to the United Nations to determine what should be done with the land.

A committee was formed and sent to Palestine to survey the situation. The committee recommended partitioning the land into two independent states: a Jewish state and an Arab state. This partition would give the Jewish state the majority of the land populated at that time by Jews, and give the Arab state the majority of the land populated by Arabs. The Jewish state was allotted 56% of the land, while the Arab state was allotted 44% of the land.

On November 29, 1947 (17 Kislev, 5707), the United Nations General Assembly voted on whether to accept the proposed Partition Plan. The Plan was accepted, with 33 nations voting in favour of the plan and only 13 nations abstaining, thus attaining the required two-thirds of the voting parties to pass. The Plan was accepted by the Jewish government, and rejected by the Arab government.

Even though the Plan was passed in the United Nations, it was never implemented, as the British government refused to enforce the partition and the Arab government rejected it. On May 14, 1948, the British Mandate in Palestine officially ended. The Jewish government declared the formation of a Jewish state, and the Arab nations attacked the Jews, starting the War of Independence.

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### Highlights for November 16 – November 22 / 13 Kislev - 19 Kislev

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
<b>SHABBAT NOV. 16</b>				
7:45 AM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Moral Values in Bereishit	Or Chaim	
10:20 AM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Parshah	Clanton Park	
<b>Before minchah</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Daf Yomi	BAYT	
<b>After minchah</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Kosher Olive Oil?	BAYT	
<b>SUNDAY NOV. 17</b>				
9:15 AM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Parshah Revisited	Zichron Yisroel	<b>Hebrew</b>
<b>After maariv</b>	R' Baruch Weintraub	13 Attributes	Clanton Park	<b>Hebrew</b>
8:00 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub	13 Attributes	4 Tillingham Keep	<b>Hebrew</b>
<b>MONDAY NOV. 18</b>				
8:00 PM	Rav Shlomo Gemara	The Prophets of Israel	Bnai Torah	
8:00 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Parshah	Shaarei Shomayim	<b>Community Beit Midrash Night Maariv at 8:45 PM</b>
8:00 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	<b>not this week</b>		
9:00 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Principles of Faith		
<b>TUESDAY NOV. 19</b>				
12:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Living Midrash	Shaarei Shomayim	<b>with Mekorot</b>
8:45 PM	Adam Frieberg	Laws of Shabbat	Shaarei Tefillah	
<b>WED. NOV. 20</b>				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Jews & Clothes, 6 of 6	BEBY	<b>with Morasha</b>
8:00 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Prophecy for Our Time	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<b>Community Beit Midrash Night Maariv at 9:50 PM</b>
8:00 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Business Ethics: Lending		
9:00 PM	R' Yehoshua Weber	Responsa: Yom Tov Shenit		
9:00 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Chabura: Sanhedrin		
<b>THU. NOV. 21</b>				
8:40 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Learning and Latte	Upanat Orot	
8:30 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Chabura: Sotah	Clanton Park	

**Coming Up: Shabbat November 22-23: A Chanukah-Themed Shabbaton at Clanton Park and Yeshivat Or Chaim!**