

VAYISHLACH

ANGELS KNOCKING ON OUR DOOR

A

Real Angels

Our *parsha* begins:

Yaakov sent *malachim* before him to his brother Eisav to the land of Sei'ir, which is the land of Edom. He commanded them saying, "Say to my master Eisav, 'So says your servant Yaakov: I have lived with Lavan and been delayed until now. I have oxen, donkeys, sheep, and servants, and I send a message to my master to find favor in your eyes.'" The messengers came back to Yaakov saying, "We have come to your brother Eisav. He is coming to you with 400 men." Yaakov then became very fearful (Bereishis 32:4-8).

The *pasuk* says that Yaakov sent "*malachim*," which can have two meanings: messengers and angels. Rashi explains that, in this context, it means actual angels. Yaakov was a prophet who could see angels and had angels accompanying him. Yaakov sent some of them to speak to Eisav, disguised as people.

Why did Yaakov send real angels to Eisav to deliver his simple message?

Some of our Sages actually criticize Yaakov for sending messengers to Eisav. Eisav already had left Eretz Yisrael to establish his

kingdom in a different area. Yaakov was free to come into Israel without disturbance. There was no reason for him to send messengers to Eisav. As the saying goes, let sleeping dogs lie. Why did he arouse Eisav by sending him his message?

Additionally, there is an extra word here. Yaakov sent the messengers “before him,” which sounds like he was going to follow the messengers to Eisav. But Yaakov had no plans to follow them. He was not going to the fields of Edom; he was heading home to Eretz Yisrael. So why is this word there?

B

Angels of Repentance

The Shem Mishmuel’s father, the Avnei Neizer, cites a Midrash. Yaakov sent these messengers to encourage Eisav to repent, to reach out to Eisav and bring him back. Eisav had a tremendous falling out with Yaakov and had in many ways abandoned the faith and lifestyle of Avraham and Yitzchak. Eisav had become a tyrant and a dictator, not at all in the spirit of his father and grandfather. He was still filled with enmity against Yaakov over the blessings. Yaakov, though, wanted to bring Eisav back, so he sent him this message. In order to bring Eisav back, simple human messengers wouldn’t work. Eisav had spent so many years in the house of Yitzchak, under the influence of his father and of his grandfather Avraham, yet he had deteriorated instead of growing. What could Yaakov do to bring him back? This is why Yaakov felt compelled to send angels. Only the call of angels could motivate Eisav to change his ways.

C

Two Mashiachs

The Midrash explains further. When Yaakov sent his message to Eisav, he said, “I have oxen, donkeys, and sheep” (Bereishis 32:6). According to the Midrash, there is a deeper meaning to the possessions that Yaakov lists. *Shor*, oxen, refers to the *meshuach milchama*, the Kohen anointed to lead the Jews in war. *Chamor*, donkeys, refers to Mashiach, as the verse says, “He will come riding on a donkey” (Zecharia 9:9). *Tzon*, sheep, represent the people of Yisrael.

This Midrash is puzzling and requires an explanation.

The Shem Mishmuel explains the Midrash based on the concept of two messiahs. According to the Gemara in a number of places (see, for example, Sukka 52a) and a strong tradition in the Zohar, there will be two messiahs. One is called Mashiach ben Yosef, from the tribe of Yosef. After his mission is completed, he will be killed, and then Mashiach ben Dovid will come. What is the point of these two messiahs?

D

Mashiach ben Yosef

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Mashiach ben Yosef is the Mashiach who will lead the battle of good against evil. We know that the idea of Mashiach ben Dovid is to bring bliss, unity, goodness, love, service of Hashem, and closeness to Him into the world. This is not a simple task. There is a great deal of evil in the world. Evil is a barrier that doesn't simply go away. Before a farmer can plant good seeds, he must remove the weeds that cover the ground. Similarly, human society over the centuries has grown many spiritual weeds and developed many evil habits. These must be removed. Only then can goodness grow in their place. Thus,

there is a double challenge for Mashiach: first to remove evil and then to bring goodness, light, and love into the world.

According to Kabbala, the job of Mashiach ben Yosef is to wage war against evil, both physical and spiritual. According to the Gemara (Sukka 52a), he might even die fighting that war. The war, though, will be won, even if the person Mashiach ben Yosef does not survive. Really, explains the Shem Mishmuel, the war against evil is a war to clear away the things that blind us. This will be a fight to dismantle our own selfish drives and goals that lead us astray from the path of righteousness.

It's not easy to achieve what the average person wants, namely, physical comfort and material plenty, while staying on the path of Torah. People do go off the path due to their selfish, material pursuits. The mission of Mashiach ben Yosef is to work on the material side of humanity, on our daily goals of success in this world. He will help us make sure that they don't lead us onto the road of evil. The mission of Mashiach ben Yosef is to remove the evil that stems from the physical, material, selfish side of human life.

The Midrash refers to Mashiach ben Yosef as the *meshuach milchama*. He is anointed to do battle against evil, like the Kohen who leads Jewish armies into war against their enemies. First, Mashiach ben Yosef will remove the barriers that block our access to holiness. These walls and barriers are known in the language of Kabbala as *klipos*, shells. Then, Mashiach ben Dovid will come to lead us into the good, spiritual, holy life. Mashiach ben Yosef will transform our hearts of stone, as the prophet calls our insensitivity to holiness, into hearts of flesh (Yechezkel 36:26). Then, Mashiach ben Dovid will lead us with our new soft, sensitive hearts onto the good and right path.

E

Mashiach ben Dovid

The Zohar writes that Mashiach ben Dovid will bring *tzaddikim* to *teshuvaoh*. This is a difficult passage. Normally, we think that only wicked people need to repent. Why do *tzaddikim* need to do *teshuva*? The Zohar means that Mashiach ben Yosef will remove evil and make every human being open and receptive to goodness. Thus, each person will be called a *tzaddik*. Mashiach ben David then will teach all the righteous to do the right things. He will teach people how to use their abilities for goodness, to channel and direct their energies towards good ways.

Mashiach ben Yosef is compared to an ox. The ox pulls the plow, preparing the ground for planting. This is the role of Mashiach ben Yosef—to remove evil from the human heart and prepare it for goodness. What is the role of a donkey? The donkey brings the seeds that are planted into the soft ground. He represents Mashiach ben Dovid, who will bring goodness into people's soft hearts and sensitive souls.

F

Shabbos and the Two Mashiachs

Shabbos contains both of these aspects. On one hand, it takes us away from the material and physical side of life that consumes so much of our time during the rest of the week. Shabbos takes us away from the impediments that often keep us away from spirituality. We are so busy during the week that we don't have time to focus on our spirituality. We need to make a living, to take care of daily concerns. We simply don't have enough time for spiritual matters. But then Shabbos comes and gives us that time. It removes the barriers, the *klipos* that block our spirituality during the week. In this sense, it is like Mashiach ben Yosef.

On the other hand, Shabbos also is like Mashiach ben Dovid. Shabbos gives us light, direction, meaning, spirituality, closeness to Hashem and His Torah and *mitzvos*, and closeness to friends, family, and other people.

G

Yaakov's Message

Yaakov sent a message to Eisav. "I have an ox," meaning the power of Mashiach ben Yosef. He told Eisav that during the twenty-two years he had spent in exile, he had developed the ability to withstand the temptations of daily living. He had worked in heat and cold and had taken responsibility for every lost sheep. He had been the epitome of the honest worker even as he was being cheated by Lavan. This was the level of Mashiach ben Yosef, of conquering the temptations of worldly success.

Yaakov also had the power of Mashiach ben Dovid, symbolized by the donkey. He brought goodness and spirituality into all of his and his family's activities.

H

Your Personal Mashiach

It is important for every one of us to find a person who will be our personal Mashiach ben Yosef, someone who will help us withstand the temptations of daily living, the pursuit of success and selfishness that creeps into our mindset. We need a guide to help us put things in perspective. It is very important to learn Torah and to receive guidance from Torah teachers. The Torah itself instructs us to control our physical desires, to be satisfied with less rather than reaching for excessive luxuries. The more we want physically, the less likely it is that we will pursue our spiritual side. Many of us are

not strong enough to buck the social trends and ignore society's push for the accumulation of wealth. This goal usually blocks our spiritual development. We need a Mashiach ben Yosef in our lives.

Equally important, we all need a Mashiach ben Dovid type of leader to tell us which positive, spiritual things to focus on once we successfully conquer evil.

I

Eisav's Potential

Eisav was a complex person. He was blessed with incredible potential and had enormous talent; Yitzchak thought that he would be the next Jewish leader. Eisav successfully built the empire of Edom in what is now northern Saudi Arabia. Many centuries later, the foundations of Rome developed from this empire. In classic Jewish literature, Rome is called Malchus Edom, the kingdom of Eisav. Whether this is historically true or an allegorical statement, our Sages saw in Rome and Edom a common denominator. They saw an amazing potential for greatness, the power of uniting people and leading them to achieve great common goals.

Unfortunately, Edom-Rome had a distorted sense of mission. It took the pursuit of physical greatness as its mission, to build an empire and to conquer more land and more people. This was the goal and achievement of the Caesars of Rome. Our Sages saw a terrible distortion in this. The goal should not have been about cruelty and domination, but about spreading goodness throughout world. Their kingdom should have been akin to the kingdoms of Dovid and Shlomo, which were kingdoms of compassion. This is what *malchus* of Dovid will be about in the future. The Jewish king will be compassionate and sympathetic. He will help orphans, widows, the poor and the downtrodden, unlike Rome, which glorified the conqueror and the hero who killed and maimed for personal glory.

Glory for Jews often is not in the physical victory but rather, paradoxically, in defeat. Defeat teaches us humility and empathy for the downtrodden and needy. This is why the Jewish nation was forged in the exile of Egypt. There, we learned how it feels to be downtrodden and defeated. We learned compassion and the great lesson of *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho*, to love another human being as oneself (Vayikra 19:18). We learned to share rather than to take and conquer. Glory is not in the conquest. It also can be found in being defeated, since that opens the person to the spiritual side of life.

Eisav, the founder of Edom, was a glory-seeker, conqueror, and a tyrant. He had amazing charisma and potential to lead others. Instead of using his talents for spiritual good, though, he used them for personal glory and grandeur.

Eisav had greatness within him. When Mashiach ben Yosef comes prior to the ends of days, there will be a physical war between the forces of good and the forces of evil. Our religion says that this must happen. As man strives for good, evil will be eradicated. The wicked followers of Eisav and the cultures they represent will be destroyed.

J

The Redeemable Side of Eisav

But this is only one part of Eisav. Another part of Eisav, however, *is* redeemable. Most people in the world have a certain level of civility and humanity. But they still are too self-centered, not as compassionate as they should be. They are following in the footsteps of Eisav. Yet they are redeemable and salvageable. One must never give up faith in the basic goodness of man. Even when we see the incredible cruelty that people can perpetrate, there still is a good side of humanity that can be brought back and redeemed.

The forces of human goodness, kindness, and civility represent this good side of Eisav, the good side of people.

One day, Chazal teach us, even the pig, which is something Jews never eat, will become kosher (see Ohr Hachaim Vayikra 11:7 and Rabbeinu Bechayei Vayikra 11:4). We may think it is not kosher and cannot be redeemed, but it can be. Thank God, we represent the Torah and are living lives of goodness. We are appalled when we see the wickedness of some people. We should know that even the pig can be redeemed, because people are fundamentally good. Yes, there is an Amalek who has lost his humanity completely and is not redeemable. Many people who commit crimes, however, can be reached and can be fixed. Some of us, unfortunately, have visited people in prison. Many of these criminals truly are repentant and redeemable. They want to be fixed and they will be fixed, because they are fundamentally good. This is the idea of Chassidus.

There is a good part of Eisav that can and will be fixed. This is why the *pasuk* says, “*Ve’alu moshi’im b’har tzion lishpot es har Eisav*. And saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Eisav” (Ovadiah 1:21). “*Lishpot*” means to *fix* Eisav. Mashiach will not just punish Eisav; there is a part of Eisav that can be fixed through education, without a physical war. This population can be taught and will learn about right and wrong, about *mishpat*. When this happens, it will be an amazing accomplishment!

K

The Attempt to Establish the Partnership Between Yaakov and Eisav

This is what Yaakov said in his message to Eisav. “I have a *shor* and a *chamor*, Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid. We can work together to lead the world to its salvation, if you so desire.” This is why Yaakov sent *real angels* to Eisav. Yaakov knew

that Eisav had tremendous defenses against change. He was quite conceited. When you tell a conceited person to change, he gets insulted and angry. Eisav was a tough case. Yitzchak had failed, and even Avraham, the great lover of people, had failed with Eisav. But Yaakov thought that where people had failed, angels might still succeed.

An angel is a being that has nothing for itself, no ego, and exists completely to do the will of its Master and Creator. Yaakov thought that if an angel would get into Eisav's heart, Eisav would learn that he lives to serve Hashem and help other people. Eisav could become a leader of the world community dedicated to good, if only an angel could get to him. Yaakov felt that he had to try to bring Mashiach and reach Eisav. It was time to resurrect the partnership that Yitzchak had envisioned between Yaakov, the man of spirit, and Eisav, the conqueror of the physical world.

Eisav, however, was not ready for this role. He simply was too self-centered to fix the world in a spiritually correct way.

Had Eisav just opened the door and let the angels say a few words to him, they would have broken through the barriers of his heart. But Eisav never let the angels in. He never gave them the chance to meet with him. When he heard that there were people coming from Yaakov, he told his soldiers, "Send them away! I don't want to speak to them." For this reason, they couldn't enter his heart. What a tragedy!

How many years have we suffered from the corrupt Eisav mentality? The world would have been a different place. Rome would have been a different empire. Instead, it became an empire focused on conceit and tyranny and taught these traits to the world. All this because of Eisav's failure to open up the door to Yaakov's angels.

L

For Us

This is a message for all of us. We have to be ready to open the door when we hear a knock. It might be an angel! We have to open the door and let that angel in. Hashem sends us angels all the time. “*Ki malachav yetzaveh lach lishmorcha b’chol d’rachecha*. For He will command His angels on your behalf to guard you in all your ways” (Tehillim 91:11). If our hearts are closed, the angels can’t get in to heal us. We have to make ourselves open to these heavenly messengers when they knock on our doors.

A child could be such an angel. When a child says, “Sit with me,” or “Play with me,” he is a little angel. How many times do we ignore that plea and say, “I’m too busy, go play with your friends.” Similarly, what a huge mistake a husband makes when he doesn’t spend time with his wife because he thinks he is too busy. How tragic!

We must keep the door wide open for those who are close to us so they can break through the stone surrounding our hearts. We need to be ready to answer our own personal angels: a child, a spouse, a friend, a *rebbe*, the holy Land of Israel, the holy People of Israel. If we open up the door, the angels can open and fix us. Then, together with the other people of the world, we can help fix the entire world we live in and make the job of Mashiach ben Yosef that much easier.

Let us pray and hope that we absorb this message of Chassidus and see angels wherever we go. There are real angels with a message from Hashem to every one of us, carrying signals to take the correct road. With Hashem’s help, we will learn to recognize and respond to our own angels.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Yaakov send real angels to Eisav?
2. Why are there two messiahs according to the Zohar?
3. What was the tragedy of Eisav?
4. Is Eisav redeemable?

EXERCISES

1. Keep a log for a week of messages you have heard from your own “angels.”
2. Mark down if you responded properly to these messages.
3. If you didn’t, what was your reason? Write it down.
4. In hindsight, were you always correct in your refusal to respond?
5. How could you make yourself more responsive to your angels’ messages?
6. Keep another log for another week and see if you have improved your responses.

Answers and Exercises
