

Parshas Vayishlach

This week's Parsha is Vayishlach- aptly named for the first word of the Parsha- where we are told that Yakov sent angels ahead of his camp to approach Esav who was in the land of Seir in the fields of Edom. Rashi clarifies that the angels that we sent were "Malachim Mamesh" literally angels, as opposed to an alternative definition of Malachim- which could mean messengers. Meaning one may posit that Yakov sent human or otherwise messengers to approach Esav, presumably to understand whether Esav was still going to try and kill Yakov, or otherwise harm his camp. Yet, Rashi tells us these were literal angels. Although the angels Yakov sent can also be messengers. The Maggid of Mezritch explains that Yakov sent the actual angels, but kept the spiritual protections for himself, highlighting a theme that has been mentioned earlier that the war between Esav and Yakov is not only physical, but more problematically on a spiritual level. And in fact, many mepharshim explain that Yakov's fear was all about the spiritual battle between him and Esav.

The fact that Yakov sent "actual angels" further elucidates what we discussed last week, about the power of Yakov and his ability to attain a spiritual place even within angels. Last week we saw that Hashem had to protect Yakov, as the Gemara in Chullin 91 explains, the angels were jealous of Yakov, and we pointed out there, that part of the envy of the angels was perhaps, Yakov's ability to attain a high level that he could be in contact with them. Such as is evident by Rashi's explanation, where Yakov sent actual angels.

Yakov sends the angels with a message. I Yakov lived with Lavan (and therefore did not see the fulfillment of father's blessings), and I have oxen and donkeys, servants, and maidservants which I am gifting to you, to find favor in your eyes. Yakov is trying to show Esav that even though time has gone by, the Berachos of Yitzchak had not been fulfilled. The angels return, and inform Yakov that Esav is acting like 'Esav' the wicked one, not Esav your brother, and he is armed with 400 men. Yakov's reaction was fearful, first as Rashi explains, so that if he goes to war with Esav, one of them will be killed, but more importantly Yakov may have to kill his brother, which he did not want to do. The second reason, as we see later in Rashi (to posuk 11), Yakov was "diminished" by all the kindness bestowed on him, specifically, he feared he may have sinned, which would result in Esav's ability to overpower him. Yakov's plan was therefore to split the camp, and ensure the survival of one, lest Esav destroy one.

Even though Yakov had been promised the outcome of success through the berachos given to him, nevertheless, he worked to maintain a level of piety to accept the berachos. Especially given that the spiritual war between Yakov and Esav was such that when one is 'up' the other is 'down' and vice versa (as explained in Rashi on the prophecy of the twins Toldos 25:23). At this point Yakov's fear was that he fell, such that Esav's merits could overpower him. The Alter Rebbe explains that the power of good is also contrasted with opposing forces of Klipa, that are ever apparent in the battle between Yakov and Esav. So with Yakov, he was worried that his spiritual levels may have been shrouded in klippos that are more evident in materiality.

There is a question in Halacha whether we can control our destiny. Meaning we know that on Yom Kippur we are given our rewards and allocations for the year. For example, the amount of money we are supposed to make. One can take a back seat, and theoretically the allocation could be bestowed on them. But we also know that we must also make ourselves as a vessel to receive the allocation. Yakov, therefore, didn't just sit back and assume his triumph over Esav, because the battle is a constant ebb and flow between the spiritual worlds. Therefore, if Esav had increased his merits, at the same time Yakov could have diminished (which was attributed to the goodness bestowed on him as Rashi explains). But we find that Yakov so to speak 'triumphed' here, that is Esav conceded and stated that all that is Yakov's should remain his, included as Rashi points out the Berachos (23:9).

There was still a chance that Esav would try to harm Yakov; after they hugged, and Esav kissed Yakov's neck- it was really a bite (as evidence by the dots on the top of the word and "he kissed" 23:4), or that Esav did not wholeheartedly kiss Yakov. Rashi explains that the dots represent the fact that the embrace was (uncharacteristically) genuine from Esav.

Only after meeting Esav, and their encounter, and concessions between the brothers, does Yakov know that he was protected. When Esav didn't accept the gifts from Yakov, Yakov stated 23:10 "do not" (speak to me this way) rather, accept my gifts. Rashi explains that Yakov explained to Esav that he battled with his angel, and won, for which Esav realized that Esav would not prevail at this point over Yakov. This culminated the power Yakov

had and his ability to transcend the physical realms to a level that he can relate to angels (he can send them, wrestle with them, make them envious etc.)

Yakov's sheer strength, and his ability to conquer the darkness, of an equally strong rival, his brother Esav, made him the chosen patriarch from which the 12 tribes stem. Yakov was the inclusion of the Chesed of Avraham, and the Gevura of Yitzchak. For this we as Jews are called Bnei Yisrael, as the 12 tribes remained righteous and virtuous, unlike the other 2 forefathers who birthed opposing klipos (Avraham had Yishmael which opposed Yitzchak, and Yitzchak had Esav which opposed Yakov). Regardless of their seemingly opposing forces, they merited being written in the Torah, and having kingdoms stem from them (Yishmael had 12 princes, and Esav had the kingdom of Edom- argued by some as the eventual Roman empire). Their power over our spirituality is an ongoing battle between our existence as Jews and the outside forces which add challenge in our Avoda as Jews. Chassidus explains that the spiritual battle between Yakov and Esav represents an element of where Hashem took the chaos of Tohu, pushed the light through tzimtzum to the world of Tikkun-rectification. Our purpose as servants of Hashem is to use Torah as a guide to unearth the sparks of G-dliness that remain under the surface, and reveal them, rectifying their otherwise chaotic form. Tikkun and Tohu are opposing forces, which were apparent in Yakov and Esav (Yakov representing Tikkun, and Esav the opposite-chaos).

Within their lifetime, Yakov reconciling with Esav was a temporary ordering of the chaos, Esav conceded defeat (on a spiritual

level) and they parted ways. What remains in the narratives by the Chumash from this battle no longer included Esav- it is now the destiny of the Jews that is unfolding. Yakov was ultimately given the promise that even through the darkness of exiles, Hashem will protect us. And we see this, the fact that regardless of the trials and tribulations that have befallen the Jews, we have remained a people spread out over the far corners of the earth.

Because this week we will celebrate 19 Kislev, which is the “Rosh Hashana” of Chassidus, after the Alter Rebbe was released from prison, and the wellsprings of Chassidus burst forth, we can draw on what the Rebbe discusses (as we also talked about in last week’s parsha) that the true pidyon (redemption) from a difficult situation is where the *menaged* (antagonist) is not only subverted, as that is a temporary solution that he is no longer fighting. Rather, when the *menaged* becomes a friend, that is when true peace will reign. What we strive to have in our lifetimes is where the menagdim (adversaries) of the world are more than silenced (as we saw Yakov temporarily conquered Esav), they are turned to becoming friends, then we will know that Mashiach is here, “V’olu Moshi’im Bhar Tzion Lishpot es Har Esav....”

Good Shabbos