

Parsha Ponders

Vayishlach | Nov 30, 2023 | 18 Kislev 5784

Angelic sightings¹

וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו אל-עשו אחיו ארצה שער שדה אדום

Yaakov sent *Malachim* ahead of him, to his brother Eisav, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom²

Yaakov was finally returning home after his long asylum from his murderous brother Eisav. The problem was, Eisav seemingly hadn't changed a bit. The Torah says that Yaakov sent *Malachim* ahead of him, to present gifts and tributes to Eisav. The hope was to avoid confrontation. These *Malachim* would seemingly be messengers, which is a valid translation of the term³. However, Rashi stresses⁴ that he sent *literal Malachim*. The Term *Malach* is usually reserved for Angels. This means, according to Rashi, that Yaakov sent Angels ahead of him to Eisav. Why? What was the purpose?

Hashem told Moshe that: "No person can see Me and live"⁵. Now, there are two explanations⁶ for why that is. It could be that it's impossible to see the Divine Presence without dying⁷. Just as a calf runs after its mother, the soul clings to its Creator when there's an encounter with the Divine. Or perhaps there's a different interpretation. Maybe it's a command from Hashem that it's forbidden to see Hashem and live. *Malachim*, Angels, "see Hashem" all the time and don't die. This verse would be forbidding an attempt to imitate the Angels, who have a special role in creation⁸.

There's an age-old debate⁹ about who is greater: the righteous, or Angels? There are arguments on either side. Perhaps these two explanations are arguing in this matter. If Angels are greater, then as we said, it would be forbidden to stare at the Divine Presence, as Angels do. On the other hand, if the righteous are greater, it should be permissible. The only problem is it leads to the soul leaving the body, resulting in death.

Yitzchak became blind in his old age. Our Sages give¹⁰ two reasons why. One is during the *Akeidah*, the famous "Binding of Isaac", he stared at the Divine Presence. In a way his life ended, as a blind person is considered no longer alive¹¹. Another explanation is that Yitzchak did nothing wrong in staring at the Divine. Becoming blind was just a means to allow Yaakov to receive his father's blessings. Yitzchak intended on blessing the wicked Eisav, but due to his blindness, he unintentionally blessed Yaakov instead.

With all of this in mind, we can suggest the following reasoning for Yaakov sending Angels to Eisav. Who is greater, the messenger, or the sender? Obviously, the sender. The righteous Yaakov sending Angels demonstrated his greatness over them. If the righteous are greater than Angels, it's permissible then to stare at the Divine. Why then did Yitzchak go blind? It must be because it was Divinely orchestrated so that Yaakov would receive the blessings. Yaakov was demonstrating to Eisav that the latter had no reason to be upset over not receiving the blessings. It was all from Hashem. Eisav was convinced by this argument, and changed his mind over killing Yaakov¹².

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on [Chanukas HaTorah parshas Vayishlach](#) § 33

² [Genesis](#) 32:4

³ [Targum Onkelos ad. loc.](#)

⁴ *Ad. loc.*, quoting [Bereishis Rabbah](#) 75:4

⁵ [Exodus](#) 33:20

⁶ The [Chanukas HaTorah](#) cites a *Midrash* which gives these two explanations, but I couldn't find it

⁷ [Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer](#) Chapter 46. See [Torah Sheleimah ad. loc.](#) § 132

⁸ I couldn't find any source for this interpretation

⁹ See [Sanhedrin](#) 93ab and [Nefesh HaChaim](#) 1:10

¹⁰ [Bereishis Rabbah](#) 65:8, 10, brought by [Rashi](#) to [Genesis](#) 27:1

¹¹ [Nedarim](#) 64b

¹² See [Genesis](#) 33:9, 10, and [Bereishis Rabbah](#) 78:11